THE NEW ADVENTURES

Doctor WHO

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AN ORIGINAL DOCTOR WHO NOVEL

**'AN END TO HISTORY. AN END TO CERTAINTY. IS THAT TOO MUCH TO ASK?'**

December, 1799. Europe is recovering from the Age of Reason, the Vatican is learning to live with Napoleon, and America is celebrating a new era of independence. But in New York State, something is spreading its own brand of madness through the streets. Secret societies are crawling from the woodwork, and there's a Satanic conspiracy around every corner.

Roz Forrester is stranded in a town where festive cheer and random violence go hand-in-hand. Chris Cwej is trapped on board the TARDIS with someone who's been trained to kill him. And when Reason itself breaks down, even the Doctor can't be sure who or what he's fighting for.

Christmas is coming to town, and the end of civilization is following close behind . . .

Doctor WHO

**LAWRENCE MILES** feels the back cover will look a bit empty if he doesn't say something interesting about himself, especially now they've taken away the 'previously unexplored realms of space and time' bit. He has a finite number of cats.

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CHRISTMAS ON A

RATIONAL PLANET

Lawrence Miles

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*Dedicated to the usual suspects.*

*'All great myths are inspired by the organic life-cycle. The hero's quest to find his perfect mate, his struggle to build a better world for his children, his willingness to give up his life for the next generation... but Time Lords do not reproduce organically, and all their young are born from the gene-looms.*

*What other conclusion can we draw? Time Lords have no understanding of myths, no understanding at all. And they have very little time for fairy-tales.'*

– Gustous Thripsted, Genetic Politics Beyond the Third Zone, appendix LXXVII

**A Prologue**

**Necessary Secrets**

There were two kinds of darkness. It was one of those things that children always forgot, the moment they were old enough and big enough to reach the light-switch.

The ordinary kind, the *dull* kind, came and went night-by-night; just a backcloth, big and black and wet, colouring in the sky and framing the city lights outside the bedroom window. It was the *other* kind you had to watch out for, the kind that lived at the back of the cupboard and in the mystical dimension behind the sofa, the kind that kept secrets, that swallowed lost toys and hinted at futures you could only ever half-understand.

True darkness. Monster darkness.

And when Roslyn Forrester looked up, that was the colour of the sky.

There was a sun, somewhere up there, but it was black, an impossible fluorescent black, turning the desert into a great bruise-coloured shadow that stretched all the way to the horizon and vanished over the edge of the world. Only under the rocks, where the sun couldn't reach, was there any kind of illumination. Pools of sticky yellow light.

The world's been turned inside out, she thought. Shadows where the light should be, light where the shadows should be.

*Arizona. That was the last place – the last real place – she remembered.*

*After the TARDIS had left Mars, the Doctor had started poking and prodding at the console, as if that'd make the machine go faster. There were things to do, he'd said.*

*'Yemaya,' he'd added.*

*'What about it?'*

*'Loose ends. After we paid our last respects to SLEEPY, Bernice asked if we should pop back and see how the whole thing started. SLEEPY 's progenitor had telekinetic powers.*

*He vanished just after you dropped in on him. All research records of the Dione-Kisumu Company spontaneously erased themselves once we'd left Yemaya 4. An impressive feat, even for the most influential of corrupt megalomaniacal corporations.'*

*Roz had raised a quiet eyebrow 'What are you suggesting?'*

*The Doctor had waved his hands in an agitated fashion.*

*'Nothing. But I hate loose ends. I hate feeling that there are things I don't know about going on behind my back '*

*'Liar,' Roz had mumbled.*

*So he'd kept on prodding, and had spent the next few days shifting the TARDIS from one end of creation to the other, looking for leads no one else would have recognized. Showing his face at seances, having tea with black magicians, poking his nose into the psychic nooks and crannies of human history.*

*He'd had an audience with Madame Blavatsky, and shuffled through Nostradamus's drawers while the great man had been out on the razz.*

*'He won't mind,' the Doctor had assured Roz. 'I'll leave a note for his wife. She's the practical one in the household, you know.'*

*Finally, they'd visited Arizona during the last days of the American empire, where the Doctor had expected to find a convention of half-crazed telepathic UFO abductees. But there had been no convention. Just a desert. Not like this one. A normal desert. A proper desert.*

*With a body in it.*

Then she heard it, the sound of raw, wet flesh grinding against rock, and realized that the creature – the alien – the monster – was

following her up out of the ravine. She'd hoped that it wasn't capable of climbing, but by the sound of it (and she wasn't going to look back to make sure), it had scaled the ravine wall faster than she had.

She kept running

*She remembered the first time she'd seen one of the creatures, as a corpse, lying out in the Arizona sun; the Doctor stumbling across it, standing over its body like the judge of the dead, a look of disapproval erupting across his face.*

Roz looked up, squinting at the landscape ahead of her, and felt something sharp and ugly scratch her optic nerve. Looking at the sun was like staring into an eclipse. She gritted her teeth.

Nothing up ahead, no buildings, no exits, definitely no TARDIS. Just a few rocks, nightmare-coloured sand and the occasional gully. She heard the thing slipping over the dust at her heels, and tried not to think about what it looked like.

She failed totally.

*It had just lain there, pockmarked and sand-blown, its big, bloated body expanding and contracting, like a sea creature washed up on a beach and gasping for water. Quite dead, the Doctor had insisted, though he couldn't tell the cause. Its movement had been some kind of automatic function, the thing constantly adjusting and re-adjusting its shape even after death, still uncertain of the exact form it should take.*

*He'd poked it with the end of his walking-cane – he'd been trying to wean himself off the umbrella – and the body had split open like a ripe peach.*

There was no sign of the Doctor now. She was on her own again, by accident or design, with just the Doctor's parting gift for company. She glanced down at the little shining sphere, cradled in her left hand. The amaranth. Goddess, why didn't they give these things proper names? 'Blasters', 'Tenser guns',

'neuro-whips'... you knew where you were with that kind of technology. What the hell was an 'amaranth' supposed to do?

'Useful,' the Doctor had said, five minutes before the world had opened up and dragged her down into its shadow. Just that, as he'd pressed the sphere into her hands. 'Useful.'

*Cwej had been fascinated by the alien corpse, of course.*

*Sure, he'd made 'yeuch' noises, but underneath it all he had a kind of morbid curiosity that a fourteen-year-old would've been proud of. Roz had glanced into the split in the thing's body, but only briefly. Coils, cords, knotted tissues, liquid pathways. It had been like looking into the workings of a visceral computer, but the patterns wouldn't stay still, the connections constantly splitting and re-arranging, breaking off to form new circuits and new systems.*

*'Is it an android?' Cwej had asked, eager to be part of the Doctor's investigation. Roz had rolled her eyes. It hadn't looked like an android at all, no face or hands or joints, nothing to identify it as the work of a humanoid species.*

*The Doctor had shaken his head. 'Gynoid.'*

*'Gynoid?'*

Roz stumbled as she made her way down a slope, regaining her balance but feeling something twist and pop in her ankle.

The thing was gaining on her. Had to be.

*'Did you ever stop to think about the word "android"?'*

*he'd said, addressing himself as much as anyone else. 'Did you ever stop to think about what it means?'*

*Cwej had shrugged. 'Robot. Machine that looks like a man, right?'*

*'No.' The Doctor had turned away, and the split skin of the dead thing had sealed itself up in seconds. 'Android. From the Greek "Ana-, Andros", meaning "man". "Oid", meaning*

*"like".'*

*Cwej had looked confused, which was hardly a novelty. 'A machine that's like a man. That's what I said.'*

*'You said a machine that looks like a man. There's a difference.'*

*'Er, what?'*

There was a moment's silence as the thing hit the bottom of the slope behind her, and for a moment Roz wondered if it had broken its neck; but a second more and it was whispering to her again, bright coppery syllables that licked at the nerves along her spine. Should've known better, she thought.

Gynoids probably don't even have necks. 'Gynoid'. Stupid name. Like a make-believe alien out of an Imperial propaganda simcord. 'Earth Versus the Gynoid Menace!'

Goddess, it'll look bloody awful on my headstone.

And then, with almost cinematic timing, she tripped.

'... the witch-skulls of Peking, a perfect pentagram burned into the forehead of every one. Our investigators believe that their owners were still alive when the marks were made, no doubt being involved in some long-forgotten pagan rite. Here, the Clockwork Fantastique, found in the ruins of an eleventh-century village, yet inexplicable even today. And here, a set of Egyptian manuscripts, found by our own Cardinal Scarlath, describing a world built by one-eyed supernatural horrors...'

Absently, Cardinal Catilin realized that he should have been enjoying this more. In all the years he'd been custodian of the Collection, this was the first time he'd had the opportunity to show the curiosities to anyone from outside the church; at the very least he should have been showing off his encyclopaedic knowledge of the 'exhibits', explaining the Satanic rituals described in the Borianu tapestries, pointing out the heretical hidden messages in the da Vinci portrait of John the Baptist... but the French woman seemed unresponsive, somehow unconcerned, as if she'd seen it all before.

Which wasn't very likely, Catilin reflected.

The woman stopped in front of one of the larger glass-fronted cases, and Catilin risked a good long look at her. She was a tall woman, her body not so much thin as somehow *pained*, her spidery limbs cloaked by a mud-coloured chemise, dark hair trickling down her back Her sharp, wide-eyed face had that haunted (some would say 'scared') look that Catilin had noticed in many survivors of the French Revolution, the skin interrupted by a circular red mark set into her left cheek.

Catilin briefly wondered what had happened to her. The mark looked like a burn, about the same shape and width as a decent-sized coin. A thin layer of make-up just failed to disguise it.

He was about to turn away when he noticed the way she was standing, back curiously crooked, fingertips against the glass. She looked like she was in pain.

'Mademoiselle? Mademoiselle Duquesne?'

The woman snapped into an upright position.

‘Cardinal? There is, ahhh, a problem?’

‘You look... unwell. If there’s anything wrong...?’

‘No. No, not at all. Please, continue. It’s all most interesting. Please.’

She attempted a smile, and Catilin noticed her hand reach for the base of her spine, as if to scratch it. Something about the movement was familiar –

Ah. Of course.

‘If I might ask a question, Mademoiselle,’ he said, before he had a chance to think about what he was saying, ‘were you at all familiar with, ah, Cardinal Roche?’

‘Roche. No. No, I don’t believe so.’

‘The previous custodian of the Collection of Necessary Secrets. My predecessor here.’ Catilin indicated the hall around him, moving his small and crumpled frame in a complete circle, as if to embrace the whole of its undusted majesty. ‘Cardinal Roche was... "gifted", shall we say. He possessed a certain "gift" which he believed to be a boon from the Higher Orders of Creation. A blessing, perhaps.’

He caught Duquesne’s eye. ‘I believe that pagan peoples would call it "The Sight",’ Catilin went on. ‘A sense, a sixth sense one might say, for the uncanny and the improper. To me, the Collection is merely a building full of oddities. To Roche, it was much more. He claimed he felt a burning in his spine whenever he grew close to certain objects, as though his body could sense the very strangeness of them. He once told me that he could often hear whispers from the skeletons and the fossils, and wondered if they wished to relate their peculiar histories to him.’

He’d been watching Duquesne as he spoke, and he’d seen her hand involuntarily shoot back to her spine. That was it.

The woman was *sensitive*, just as old Roche had been.

Probably the only reason why her employers had sent her here.

The French weren’t in the habit of using women as agents.

‘How fascinating,’ she said, flatly.

‘Indeed,’ said Catilin, deciding not to tell her that Roche had gone quite mad and cut his own throat open with one of the Collection’s sharper ‘exhibits’.

*‘What do men do?’ the Doctor had asked, turning his back on them.*

*The question had been directed at Cwej, which was a pity, as Roz had thought of about half a dozen smart answers in no time at all. ‘Er,’ Cwej had said. ‘Er, give up.’*

*‘The same things as women,’ Roz had muttered. ‘But without wiping the sick off the furniture afterwards.’*

There was a furrow, a tiny indentation in the ground, and Roz had run right into it, catching the toe of her boot against the lip and losing her balance. Instinctively she threw her arms out in front of her, realizing that it probably didn’t make much difference how you fell if there was an alien monster breathing down your neck. She felt the amaranth slip out of her grasp.

*‘No. Not the same at all.’ The Doctor had paused, as if he had difficulty getting to grips with this subject himself ‘The male and female of the species, of every humanoid species, have completely different psychologies. Evolution made sure that their brains were suited to very different tasks. Usually the two perspectives lock together, and no one even notices the join. Nobody spots the difference. Usually, that’s how civilizations are made.’*

*Roz had folded her arms impatiently, wondering what this had to do with dead aliens, and Cwej had looked like he hadn’t been following any of it.*

*‘Men build,’ the Doctor had continued, his Gaelic inflection becoming more noticeable by the second. ‘Their fundamental purpose is to act as architects. Towers. Pillars.*

*Bridges. All men’s things. In a man’s world, everything has to be defined, named, planned with precision. Things have to be conquered, not accepted. No patch of earth is complete until it has a building on it. An orderly, precise, geometrically exact building.’*

Roz rolled as she hit the ground, and realized that she was on top of another slope. Fine by her. She pushed herself over the edge, picking up momentum as she spun downhill. Once in every 360-degree roll, she could see the gynoid as a grey blur framed against the unnatural black of the sky. There was something else, too, a flash of gold, somewhere nearby.

The amaranth. Obviously.

*'Towers and pillars. Right.' Roz had remembered an Academy lecture on Freudian symbolism in the psychology of the serial killer, and remembered that she hadn't listened to most of it. Routine procedure when faced with a serial killer was to blow his kneecaps off, so she'd never understood what his psychology had to do with anything. And women?'*

*'Different instincts. The female psyche has no need to construct, no need to control –'*

*Cwej had giggled, but they'd ignored him.*

*'– no need to define. The female psyche is adaptable, mutable. That's why little boys dream of killer robots and little girls dream of faerie queens. A generalization, of course. In many cultures, men tend to see that difference as a weakness, which is probably why killer robots are always in fashion and faerie queens get such a bad press.'*

*'They don't see it as a weakness,' a voice had said. 'They see it as a threat.'*

*There had been a moment of shocked silence. It had been Cwej's voice, but Roz couldn't believe that it had been Cwej speaking. This was Chris Cwej, for Goddess' sake, Chris Cwej who'd had a bedroom full of toy anti-grav starfighters, Chris Cwej who'd once spent six hours in the TARDIS wardrobe trying on every single pair of sunglasses in the Doctor's collection until he'd found the ones he thought were 'neatest'.*

*He'd been having these moments of inspiration ever since Yemaya, Roz had noticed, but where the hell had that little pearl of wisdom come from?*

*The Doctor had looked as if he'd just been dealt a killing blow, as if the comment had been a personal attack on him.*

*'Perhaps,' he'd conceded.*

Her back slammed into something, and Roz realized that she'd rolled into a large rock, positioned right at the bottom of the slope. Whichever god or goddess put that there, she thought as the pain crackled up her spine, should be making Tom and Jerry cartoons. But the whispering was getting closer, and she looked up, towards the advancing gynoid, determined to face death head-on.

It was a pathetic gesture, but it was the best she could do at short notice.

*"Android",' the Doctor had repeated. 'Meaning "manlike".*

*Not because it looks like a man, but because it's just like a man. Even if it looked like a woman, or a tiger, or a hairy monotreme, or a shapeless green blob, it would still be a man's machine. Perfectly ordered artificial life. The ultimate creation of the masculine psyche. Whereas, by contrast...'*

*... and he'd pointed his cane at the corpse of the gynoid.*

The blur was rolling down the slope towards her, new orifices opening in its quicksilver skin every second. The whispers spilled into Roz's ears until they filled every avenue in her head and turned the world into static.

*She and Cwej had both glanced back at the dead thing, still quivering in the sun. 'Gynoid,' Cwej had said, apparently back to normal. 'It's Greek, right? "Gyno". Like "woman". '*

*'Yes.' There'd been a strain in the Doctor's voice, and he'd just failed to disguise it. And it shouldn't be here.'*

*'Uh-huh. You mean, they don't build them round this part of the galaxy?' Yeah, that was Cwej. Chief Inspector Cwej, determined to be on top of the case.*

*'You weren't listening.' The Doctor had scowled, though not at anyone in particular 'Gynoids aren't "built". Only androids are "built". Gynoids just are.'*

They just *are*, Roz thought. Yeah, right. And now one of them just *is* about to bite my legs off.

Then there was something else, a high-pitched chiming, as the amaranth hit the rock next to her and rang like a bell. Even without looking, she could tell that it was spinning in the dust, making the same sound a glass makes when you run your finger around the rim. Louder, though, loud enough to make her eardrums ache. The gynoid raised its many voices, trying to make itself heard above the screeching, and just for a moment Roz could almost tell what it was trying to say... then the yellow light under the rock crept out into the darkness, folded itself around her, and blotted out the world.

The skeleton within the case was that of a huge, lizard-like creature, a row of dagger-shaped spines punctuating its back.

Catilin wondered if the woman was really looking at it, or just using it

as an excuse not to catch his eye again.

‘The bones were discovered in the great deserts of the New World,’ Catilin told her. ‘As you can see, they belonged to some behemoth which no longer walks the Earth. My fellow cardinals insist that its species was destroyed during the great flood, though there is, as always, talk of God releasing unto them a great fire from Heaven.’

Duquesne nodded. ‘And His Holiness... God rest his soul...

refused to let the skeleton be exhibited in public?’

‘God rest his soul. Yes. We have many skeletons like this one, or fragments of them. Shortly before his passing, His Holiness decided that all such relics should be interred here upon their discovery. The Collection is, after all, a repository for those things which we feel it would be... inappropriate ...

for the general public to see. The discoverers of the bones are usually easy to pay off, their treasures brought here from around the world.’

‘I do not quite understand.’ The woman’s voice was strained, and Catilin guessed that she was trying to keep her

‘sensitivity’ under control. ‘Why such secrecy? Why should you keep such things from the eyes of the people?’

Catilin frowned. ‘Those few men of reason who have examined them claim that the bones are older than one might expect. More than six thousand years old, which, according to the holy scripture, would seem to be older than the age of the Earth, as created by our Lord. In death, then, these creatures accuse the scripture of fraud. Naturally, it does not do for such accusations to be made public.’

Duquesne was silent for a while, and Catilin wondered if he should continue with his half-hearted guided tour. And then;

‘This will not last forever,’ she said.

‘Mademoiselle?’

‘The Vatican cannot be in every place at once. Discoveries will soon be made that your "fellow Cardinals" will overlook.

The public will see all these things, which you have hidden from them for so long. Reason dictates it.’

‘Perhaps. Though even reason would fail to answer many of the mysteries in the Collection, I’m sure. There is a skeleton of a man in our vaults that was found side-by-side with one of these great reptiles, while Cardinal Roche claimed to have seen the corpse of a creature that was half-way between man and fish, refuting both science and the book of Genesis.’

Catilin nodded contemplatively. ‘However, if there’s one thing I refuse to argue with, it’s the Age of Reason. At least, not with the French.’

‘A good Catholic not arguing with reason? Unthinkable!’

Catilin had asked for that, of course, but he let out a loud sniff anyway, as if mortally offended. She’d touched a nerve, it was true. The Vatican couldn’t hold off the Age of Reason for much longer. Since His Holiness had died, the Church had been under the thumb of the bastard conqueror Bonaparte, and the world knew it; that was why the woman was here, come to survey the Collection for the ‘little Emperor’, just as they’d survey all the Vatican’s secret treasures, from the Library of St John the Beheaded in London to the living specimens of the Crow Gallery in Southern Africa. Something vast and raw and new was forcing its way into the world, Catilin reflected, ripping up the traditions and the establishments, replacing monarchies with revolutionaries and revolutionaries with short French megalomaniacs. New rulers. New religions. A new century on its way.

Catilin suddenly noticed that the woman had moved on and was standing, frozen, in front of an ancient scrap of parchment, covered with tiny dancing figures.

‘Primitive art,’ Catilin told her. ‘Hundreds of years old, though the fabric is of unknown manufacture. The illustration is of Shango, a god of lightning. Thought to be the only pictorial representation of the deity in existence –’

But Duquesne wasn’t listening. Her eyes had become glass baubles, her face flushed red as if she were about to burst into flames, her attention fixed on the little figure of Shango as he danced in front of the oblong ‘magic box’ with which, according to the parchments, he travelled a mystic triangle between the Earth, the sky, and the future.

‘ *Caillou*,’ Duquesne said, her voice reduced to a croak.

Catilin opened his mouth to ask her what she meant.

But she’d fainted dead away.

**PART ONE**

**STATE OF INDEPENDENCE**

*‘The first century began with the year 1 AD and ended with the year 100 AD. Hence, the twentieth century began on January 1st 1901 and will end on December 31st 2000 AD.*

*The first day of the twenty-first century and the "Third Millennium" will be the first day of 2001 AD, not the first day of 2000 AD as is commonly thought [...] yet when discussing such ideas as "millennial rites" and "thousand-year shifts", astrologers and numerologists consider December 31st 1999*

*to be the crucial date of change, thus getting their calculations wrong by a whole year. The conclusion is obvious. The actual dates are unimportant; it is our perception of the dates that matters. So-called "end-of-the-century fever" has more to do with human hysteria than with astrological significance... ‘*

– James Rafferty, **Portents and Pathways** (1978)

*‘When we get piled upon one another in large cities, as in Europe, we shall become corrupt as in Europe, and go to eating one another as they do there.’*

– Thomas Jefferson (1787)

**1**

**Waifs and Strays**

New York State was celebrating. But that didn’t mean it was *happy*.

The festivities had spread across the East Coast like a pox, taking Manhattan first, then Brooklyn, then Richmond; the smaller towns had been the last to fall to the fever, and when they’d fallen, they’d fallen with a kind of grudging contempt.

When the garlands and the banners and the polished wooden angels had gone up in Woodwicke – a town the world in general had never really noticed, and probably never would –

their colours were garish and aggressive, the people unwilling to celebrate without a snarl. During the War most of them had been loyal to the losing side, and even now, even after history had given them a

hundred and one other things to be unhappy about, they still seemed to want a rematch. Christmas bled from the windows, dripped reluctantly out of the storefronts.

The eighteenth century was in its dying days, and Woodwicke was a town that knew exactly what the President could do with his 'new age of freedom's glory'.

But of course, the 'attractions' had opened for business even there. The craftsmen, the performers, the novelties; stalls run by middle-aged businessmen pretending to be gypsies and second-rate medicine peddlers masquerading as miracle-workers. Mystics and stargazers, showmen who turned the black arts into an almost-but-not-quite acceptable form of entertainment.

So when Isaac Penley entered the fortune-teller's tent on Eastern Walk, he instinctively glanced around to make sure no one was watching him. It was the very evening before Christmas Day, and for Isaac – esteemed member of the local council and upstanding pillar of the community, as he'd readily tell anyone who bothered listening to him – the holy festival was about to be laced with a touch of necromancy.

'Sit down,' said the witch-woman, and Isaac sat.

The woman was a Negro (Negress, Isaac corrected himself), but she was alone in the tent, unsupervised and unattended. Her face didn't seem to fit what he knew about the black species; the slave-ships that occasionally docked at Woodwicke carried creatures whose faces all seemed identical to Isaac, pitch-dark and lifeless, but this woman could almost have been fashioned from an entirely different material. Her skin was tinged with ash, her hair streaked with full-moon grey, and her bearing seemed almost aristocratic.

Once, in New Orleans, Isaac had visited a carnival far grander than any that had ever been seen in Woodwicke. At one of the sideshows there had been a huge leather-skinned Negro on a great wooden throne, his half-naked body covered with smudges of red and yellow paint. The Negro's attendants had informed the audience that this was Konga-Tchin, fearsome warrior-king of darkest Africa, who had slain tigers with his bare hands and destroyed entire armies on the battlefield. The audience had paid good money to hear the tales of Konga-Tchin, the attendants translating the answers he gave to their questions ('Have you ever wrestled a crocodile?'

‘Is it true you eat people in Africa?’). There had been something about his bearing, as well, a kind of nobility; as if he were lost in this land, but still determined to hold on to the memory of his past life and the dignity it afforded him.

Except, of course, that Konga-Tchin had turned out to be a fake. A runaway slave, employed by a showman with a flair for the exotic.

‘Abracadabra, shalom-shalom,’ growled the Negress. Isaac found himself distracted by her costume, a rough shawl covering smoother, tighter garments that he couldn’t quite identify. ‘I see into the mists of time and stuff, blah blah blah.

Anything in particular you wanted to know?’

There was, but he couldn’t find the words, so he just shook his head. ‘Erm, no. Nothing. In particular. Um, the future?’

The Negress leaned back in her seat, and Isaac got the impression that she really didn’t give a damn about anyone’s future but her own. ‘Yeah, well, there’s a lot of it, the universe is still in red shift. There’s a couple of good wars coming up, if you like that kind of thing. I can give you some dates, if you want. People are going to get born. They’ll go through the usual interpersonal shit. They’ll kill each other.’

She shrugged.

‘Works for me,’ she said.

‘Well, yes.’ Isaac nodded seriously, as if to prove that he wasn’t confused by such profound thoughts. ‘But I was thinking of something a little more... personal?’

‘Personal?’

‘Personal. Um. *My* future.’

The woman sighed. ‘What’s your name?’

‘What?’ Isaac had a sudden vision of some monstrous jungle-god, scratching his name into the book of the damned.

‘Um, I’d rather not...’

‘ *Name?* ’

He cleared his throat. ‘Penley,’ he mumbled. ‘Isaac Penley.’

‘Right. You’re not going to achieve anything of note in your entire life. If you were important, the Doctor would’ve claimed to have met you by now. He’s claimed to have met just about everyone else. Henry the Eighth. Cyrano de Bergerac. Everyone.’

Isaac opened his mouth to ask who the Doctor was, then imagined a half-naked witch-doctor dancing before the jungle-god, talking with the spirits of the famous dead. His jaw snapped shut again.

‘All right,’ said the woman, misreading his expression. ‘I’ll tell you what you want to know. You’ll lead a happy, prosperous life, move out to the plains, buy yourself a nice big house and a nice big flitter, or horse-and-cart, or whatever it is you have here, and your children’ll grow up to be lawyers or generals or something. You still won’t achieve anything much, and you’ll die of old age, probably in your sleep. Happv?’

She didn’t so much say the last word as bite a word-shaped hole out of the air. Isaac nodded, for the simple reason that he couldn’t think of anything else to do.

‘Good. Any other questions?’

*Any other questions?*

Yes, thought Isaac. Oh, yes. Questions about the shape the world is being twisted into, questions about the mumblings I hear from the town and all the wars they seem to want to start, questions about Church and State and Heaven and Hell and politics and anarchy and everything in between. Questions that I can’t even fit into proper sentences.

And he felt a series of words slide onto his tongue, and prayed that this would be it, that this would be the one question he desperately needed to ask, that just the right letters would fall from his lips and the Negress would understand what he really wanted and give him all the answers.

He opened his mouth.

‘Is it true you eat people in Africa?’ he heard himself say.

There was a silence as big as all outdoors. The woman’s expression was unreadable.

‘No,’ she said, emotionlessly. ‘But that isn’t going to stop me biting

your face off.'

Erskine Morris stared at the thing that was floating near the top of his drink, sniffed it, swore at it, then swallowed it anyway. He had no idea whether it was a vital ingredient of the cocktail or just a piece of flotsam that had accidentally fallen into his glass, but the liquid was powerful enough to make sure that his taste-buds never found out for certain.

Besides, he was three glasses past caring.

' *Naturellement*, I find the writings of Monsieur Jefferson most interesting,' Tourette was saying on the other side of the pub. 'His thoughts on liberation are most liberating. A-hahhah.

Hah-hah.'

'Hellfire and buggery,' Erskine growled, and downed the rest of the drink.

His chair made an ugly cracking sound under his weight.

Erskine Morris was a big man; not fat, not muscular, just *big*, in some vague and indefinable way that the world's furniture-makers were obviously unprepared for. When he sat, his legs would spill awkwardly across the floor, and his elbows would topple any table that was unlucky enough to be in the vicinity.

Furniture 'disagreed' with him.

'As we say in my own country, gentlemen; *liberté, égalité, fraternité*.' Tourette spread his arms wide, as if he'd just said something terribly profound and was waiting for a round of applause. His audience – three unfortunate members of the Society who'd been unable to escape the idiot Frenchman's attentions – nodded dumbly, not knowing where to look.

By all the sodomized choirboys of Pope Pius VI, thought Erskine, things are going from bad to worse around here. Back when he'd joined the New York Renewal Society, there'd been an unshakeable code of conduct. The Society had been a group of Deists, atheists and rationalists, with three principle aims: to advance the cause of reason; to annoy the hell out of the damned Papists; and to experiment with every alcoholic concoction known to science. But now?

Erskine let his eyes wander around the old King George, getting used

to the gaslight that lit the hollow shell of the building. There were men standing around in their Sunday bests, looking like blubbery children in stiff shirts, discussing a hundred and one half-cocked philosophies that were probably all the rage in Paris or Rome or London. Erskine's gaze settled on one man in particular, surrounded by a small audience that seemed a good deal more interested than Tourette's had been. The man was hard to miss. His shapeless, powder-pale face was hardly a face at all, just a collection of features looking for somewhere to happen, while his thin grey hair looked as though it had been painted onto the top of his head.

Matheson Catcher. The worst of the lot.

'Many primitive races worshipped nature's tyranny,'

Catcher was saying, his voice a constant *throb-throb-throb* that made Erskine think of someone turning the handle of a music box. 'The so-called goddesses of the druids, the sickly cults of Hecate and Astarte. But the architects of Peru understood the true horror of the natural world. Consider their greatest constructions, gentlemen, built in defiance of the jungle's chaos. An example to the world. We are not primitives, we are men of Reason. We have a duty, a responsibility, to hold back the chaos of our own age in the same manner.'

'By building pyramids,' Erskine grunted under his breath.

'Bloody stargazer.'

Catcher paused for a moment, giving Erskine the irrational feeling that he'd heard. 'There is a nobility in architecture, gentlemen. Architecture is purity itself, the triumph of the rational mind over the terrible Cacophony of nature. Only through this purity can we know the Wa...'

Catcher tailed off, like a man who'd just caught himself giving away a secret.

'...can we know God,' he finally concluded.

Erskine winced at the G-word, and cast a critical eye over the man's audience. Certain members of the Society (weak-willed, pox-brained members, naturally) were incapable of staying away from Catcher. Erskine had become convinced that 'unofficial' Society meetings were going on somewhere, just Catcher and his 'inner circle' of hangers-on. If this goes on, thought Erskine, we'll be no better than the damned Freemasons. There were even half-serious rumours that Catcher and

his gullible friends had summoned up Baalzebub, rumours which the man had no doubt started himself in order to appear more interesting. Erskine had made several loud jokes about Catcher sprouting horns and drinking blood, but no one had thought they were funny, and even Isaac Penley –

a humpty-dumpty little man who usually laughed at everyone's jokes, and only seemed to have joined the Renewalists because he didn't have anything better to believe in – had just turned away, embarrassed.

Then Erskine became aware of a sound, a ticking, clicking sound; and, with a start, he realized that Catcher was staring directly at him from across the old pub. Catcher's eyes were little grey pebbles. Little grey pebbles that blinked once every eight seconds – precisely, Erskine had timed them – as if there were a mechanism of clockwork inside his head.

Ticking.

Clicking.

'Hellfire and sodomy,' Erskine exclaimed, then realized that he'd actually shouted it out at the top of his voice.

When Roslyn Forrester slouched back to the house on Burr Street – at about 19:30 hours, by her reckoning – someone was waiting for her on the stoop.

'Want any help?' he said.

He was, by local standards, a boy. Sixteen, maybe seventeen, with the kind of face that would have found him a good role in a spaghetti western, had he been born two hundred years later. There were no teenagers here, Roz remembered. There were boys, and there were men, with nothing in between but wet dreams and bad complexions. The boy's clothes fitted so badly that they could only have been stolen.

'What did you have in mind?' she asked, not trusting him an inch.

The boy shrugged. 'Can't be easy, looking after the house by yourself. Me, I'm ready to work cheap. Just naturally generous, that's me. So I got to thinking, well, give the woman a chance, let her know she should get me now 'fore I'm in demand.' He gave her a grin that wasn't entirely unpleasant, except for the fact that it was yellow.

Roz just scowled. He didn't react, meaning that she was too tired even to scowl properly.

'You know anything about temporal engineering?' she asked.

'Say again?'

'Restructuring local space–time in order to facilitate movement through the fourth dimension. Know anything about it?'

The boy nodded thoughtfully. 'Haaaahhh. Well, I can put shoes on horses. Don't know if you could get *them* through your fourth dimension. Maybe you'd have to give 'em a push.'

Roz scowled again, reminding herself that sarcasm wasn't exclusive to her own century. She failed to think of any witty or half-intelligent response, so she just told him to piss off.

'Right,' said the boy, as if it were perfectly normal for people to talk to him like that. He gangled to his feet. 'Can I ask you a question?'

'It'd better be a good one.'

'You some kind of lunatic?'

'I'm the *best* kind of lunatic. *Dementus futurus*, the lesser–

spotted ranting bloody psychopath. Now get lost.'

The boy shrugged. 'Your loss,' he said, and sulked off around a corner.

Roz unlocked the front door with a carefully placed kick, and dragged herself into the main hall of the house. The hall was large but mostly empty, ringed with columns of fake marble that made no difference to the way the roof stayed up.

There were a lot of houses like that in Woodwicke. America had just worked out that it was an expanding empire, so the architects had decided to make every building look like a Roman ruin. A cheap, tasteless, badly furnished Roman ruin, in this case.

It wasn't much of a house, Roz told herself, but it was home. Not *her* home, obviously, and the owner would get a hell of a shock if he unexpectedly came back to it, but it was the only place she'd been able to find, and even that had been a fluke. As far as she'd been able to figure out, the owner was some kind of second-rate businessman who'd waltzed off to Asia to deal in commodities that no one wanted

to talk to her about; he wasn't due back until spring, which gave her about two months more to pretend to be the housekeeper. Slave.

Whatever.

Six weeks, she'd been here now. Six weeks of sneaking and scraping that made a survival training course on Ponten Luna Sierra look like an all-expenses-paid holiday on Disneyplanet.

Six weeks of very little sleep and even less food.

Six weeks of looking for the TARDIS.

As for the time before that... just random images. Arizona had opened up and swallowed her, Chris telling her to *get out of the crukking way* as she'd been sucked through a crack in the world. Then she was running, she was trying not to look back at the gynoid, she was falling, the sphere was spinning...

And then she was here. Here in New York State. Here in 1799.

At Christmas.

Lost.

As lost as you can get, in fact, with no way of letting the others know where she was or how to find her. There were no organizations here that might know the Doctor, no LONGBOWs or PROBEs, and no way of sending out any kind of distress call. The one possible means of communication she'd had – the damned amaranth that had presumably brought her here – had got itself lost. *It* had got *itself* lost. She was quite adamant that *she* hadn't lost it. When she'd woken up in this time-zone, finding herself lying in a puddle of frost and dirty water in the woods on the edge of town, there'd been no sign of the thing. She imagined it trundling away of its own accord, looking for a more interesting owner than Roslyn Inyathi Forrester.

*Ah yes, Roslyn Inyathi Forrester. Professional fortune-teller and small-town oddball. A bitter, cynical woman who seriously believed that she used to travel to the stars with a diminutive magician, and who spent her poor, wasted life trying to find her way back to the delusion.* Dementus futurus.

*The best kind of lunatic.*

Which is why she'd had to develop her own escape plan, why she'd spent the last two weeks planning, waiting and brooding, and why

there was now something heavy and metallic and probably illegal nestling in her pouch. She'd only survived this long by setting herself up as an 'attraction', her tent supplied by showmen who took most of what she made as payment, but there was a limit to the time she could go on telling false futures for failed businessmen and using the same stories and answering the same questions and *Goddess oh Goddess I have to get out of here this place is killing me I said this place is killing me.*

It was half past eight on Christmas Eve when Daniel Tremayne heard the call. Of course, as far as Daniel was concerned, the time was just 'night' and the date was just

'today'.

He was on Hazelrow Avenue when it started, standing in the shadow of the grey house on the corner, slipping into the dark spaces behind the porch pillars whenever a carriage rolled past. Making sure he wasn't seen. No particular reason for that; Daniel Tremayne just didn't like being seen. The people who lived in towns like this – the soft people, the ones who could stay in one place till the end of the world came for them, the farmers and the lawyers and the storekeepers – had built this world out of their queer politics, out of weird rituals like 'Christmas' and 'Day of Independence', and Daniel lived in the cracks of that world. Seventeen-and-a-half years of hiding in alleys. A lifetime of not being noticed.

The house looked ugly in the moonlight, uglier than he'd remembered it. The windows weren't lit, and there were pools of darkness around the top-floor balconies, so it looked like the roof was being held up by shadows. The house had been kind-of-square, once, but the owner had stripped it down and rebuilt it so often that the place just looked like a shape, now, instead of being any shape in particular. Passers-by looked away when they walked past it, like they were embarrassed or something. The other buildings on Hazelrow Avenue were fine, all pearl-white pillars and marbled walls and cosy gas-lit windows, but the house on the corner... Daniel remembered the soldiers who'd fought the Revolution, men who'd been out in the snow so long that their arms and legs had twisted and turned black. The house was like that, like the town's dead limb

Daniel Tremayne climbed up onto the stoop and stood there awhile, getting ready to knock. Rehearsing.

*Mr Catcher? Don't know if you remember me...*

No. Catcher was too formal for that kind of thing. Last time Daniel had been through Woodwicke, the man had hired him to work on the cellars and the attics of the house, tearing out timbers and ripping up floorboards. Daniel hadn't asked why, because he knew better than to ask questions, but Catcher had told him anyway. Something about the purity of the architecture, something Daniel hadn't understood.

*Sir, regarding the circumstances of our previous dealings...*

Oh God, this was awful. Talking to Catcher was like talking to a clock; you could almost hear the ticking going on inside him, but you couldn't expect him to smile, or frown, or do anything that might make him look half-human. Daniel was only here because he was desperate. A day and a half he'd been in Woodwicke, and he hadn't found a single place that wanted him. He hadn't even been needed at the McClellan house, where the new slave had asked about space–time engineering (hahh?), then told him to 'piss off' in a voice that made her sound like an English noblewoman. He'd spent the previous night in the ruins of an old pub, staying half-awake in case the watchmen turned up, because everyone knew what watchmen did to vagrants and wanderers and itinerants.

*Mr Catcher, sir, I was just wondering...*

And that was when he first heard the call, from somewhere on the other side of the door. Like a humming, like a hissing, noises twisted out of shape by half a dozen walls or more.

Call? What kind of a call? Nothing important, Daniel Tremayne, nothing that's any of your business. You've lived seventeen-and-a-half years by keeping your head down and not getting mixed up in other people's fights, and it's not a call, it's just a noise, that's all. Who'd be calling *you*, anyhow?

But he was already hopping down off the stoop, checking the street – instinctively – to make sure no one was watching him, and creeping around the corner of the building, because Daniel Tremayne crept everywhere, whether he needed to or not. The shadows at the side of the house were thick enough to hide him from the eyes of any passers-by, and there was another door set into the brickwork there, in the narrow channel between the main building and the shithouse. An entrance for servants, salesmen and anyone else who was too poor to use the front door, Daniel guessed. He crept between the piles of junk and firewood that had built up around the entrance, listening for the call. The noise was stronger here, like a pulse, like a Negro rhythm. Or

maybe it was just the *thought* of a noise, a kind of feeling you couldn't pin down, like the way you could tell a storm was coming before it arrived?

' *This is none of your business, Daniel Tremayne,* ' someone squealed, and he almost started to run before he realized that he'd said it himself.

The door was locked. Daniel wondered how he knew that, then remembered that he'd just tried to open it, without even noticing what he was doing.

'This is none of your business,' he insisted, and the lock clicked open. Daniel knew maybe half a dozen ways of opening locks, but if anyone had asked him which he'd used, he wouldn't have been able to say. Burgling. Didn't they still hang you for that, in this town? You trying to get yourself killed all of a sudden, Daniel Tremayne?

But the call was telling him to open the door, and the hinges were squeaking, and the sound was already rushing out of the darkness and going for his throat.

'Catcher!'

During his forty-three years on the planet Earth, many opinions had been formed about the temper of Erskine Morris.

Some – mainly his close family, admittedly – claimed that his loud, aggressive nature was just a façade that hid a deeply lovable 'inner self', while others just wished that he'd keep the noise down. Even Erskine had to admit that, from time to time, his perpetually foul mood was a social drawback.

Now, however, he had cause to be very, very glad of it.

Because although he would never have admitted it – not even to the holy bastard son of Galileo, by Christ – right now, it was the only thing stopping him from being utterly terrified.

'Catcher! For the sake of Saint Peter and all his baby catamites, man, you've got thirty seconds to show yourself or I'll rip your damned heart out!'

It had all started at the meeting, of course. Erskine had finally snapped, looking into Catcher's blinking pebble-eyes and accusing him of any number of things, from being an irrational mystic to bringing

the Society into disrepute.

Catcher had taken it all remarkably well, except possibly for the 'irrational' part. He'd frowned, just for a second, the first time Erskine had seen that happen.

'Are you a *rational* man?' he'd asked, with deadly seriousness.

Erskine had laughed once, loudly, and tried to ignore the funny looks he was getting from the other Society members.

'Of course I'm a bloody rational man. Jesus Christ and his big Negro brother, Catcher, what kind of doughy-eyed stargazer do you take me for?'

Catcher had nodded, and Erskine could almost have heard the cogs and wheels turning in his head. 'Good,' the man had said, humourlessly. 'Good.'

And he'd promptly invited Erskine to his house.

It had taken Erskine a while to realize that he was being formally invited to a meeting of Catcher's 'inner circle'. Well, how could he refuse an invitation like that? He'd get to the bottom of the man's madness, ohhh yes, even if he had to walk through the blistering gates of Hell to do it.

But then it had all started to go wrong. When he'd arrived at the man's disgusting house, Catcher and his little band of followers had been waiting in ambush. They'd blindfolded him – or rather, drawn some kind of cowl over his head – then tied his hands behind his back and led him, protesting in words of four letters or less, around more corners than he could count.

'Catcher! *Catcher!* '

He'd been right, all the time. Catcher was no better than a buggering Freemason. He'd heard the stories of the rituals the Masons put each other through, humiliation and symbolic execution, vows made until death, gullible idiots blindfolding each other and swearing to slaughter those who crossed them with fish-gutting knives –

– oh, damnation.

'I'm warning you, man! If all this ends with my good self tied naked with a spit up my arse, I'll chew every inch of skin off your body!'

No good. He was alone now, he was sure of it, no doubt locked in Catcher's cellar or some such vile locale. Erskine felt his arm brush against something solid, a pillar or a door-frame. He rubbed his head against the shape, pushing the hood up over his forehead until it fell away from his face.

The first thing he saw was a column, like something out of an ancient Greek temple. Not cheap-looking, though, not like those ghastly mock-classical houses on Burr Street. Erskine squinted. Beyond the column was another, then another, then another...

With a start, he realized that he was in a corridor, lined with pillars on both sides. The walls looked like marble, shot through with veins of some unrecognizable foreign material.

He turned his head. The passage stretched as far as the eye could see in both directions, occasionally branching off into side-tunnels. The corridor was longer than Catcher's entire house.

Where in the name of sodomy was he?

*Io Ordo Io Io Ordo*, a voice whispered in his ear.

Erskine Morris felt the muscles in his legs begin to grind together, and noticed – almost as if it were happening to someone else – that he was moving, stumbling down the passage with his hands still bound. He had absolutely no idea where he was going. In fact, he had absolutely no ideas at all.

Something cold and hard shifted inside Roz's pouch. She tried to ignore the illusion that the shape was alive and impatient.

Her stomach started singing protest songs when she came within sight of the church on Paris Street, so she drifted into the nearby general store and wasted the morning's earnings on a pocketful of something edible and vegetable-based, hoping this would be the last time she'd need local currency. The shop was swamped with the usual festive decorations, the owner intent on pushing the local laws of commerce to their very limits and staying open right up until the dawn of Christmas Day.

'Not just celebrating Christmas,' he told her from behind his polished counter, speaking slowly as if talking to a child.

'It's the anniversary.'

‘Really,’ she growled.

‘Ten years since they signed the Constitution. Give or take a few months.’

‘I’m happy for you,’ she said.

‘ *And* sixteen years since we beat the shite out of the British.’

She stuffed some of the food into her mouth, half-noticing that it tasted like apricots. ‘Sixteen. Not the kind of anniversary you normally celebrate. Ten, yeah. Fifteen, maybe. But sixteen…?’

The man stared at her as if she’d just admitted to being a baby-eating devil-worshipper.

‘It’s usual enough in *these* parts,’ he said pointedly.

She decided not to argue. These people just needed a reason to celebrate. Any reason, whether they agreed with the principle behind it or not. It’d been one of those centuries.

Like that little fat-faced man, Isaac someone-or-other, who’d come to her tent just to ask if there was a future at all. End-of-the-century blues. There’s always someone who thinks the world’s going to end.

Roz continued along the street until she came to the church, and squatted on the steps, concentrating on the building opposite. One of a dozen stone-faced pseudo-mansions on Paris Street, with narrow windows and whitewashed walls, fronted by a porch made up of unconvincing classical archways. She’d come here a lot, the past few days, watching the house from the church steps, concentrating on the routine of the man who lived there and trying to look like she was just a poor dumb foreigner basking in the glory of this fine monument to the Protestant faith. Just another stake-out, she’d tell herself.

In her pouch, the cold thing pushed against her leg expectantly. She rested her hand on the lump.

The house was owned by a man called Samuel Lincoln, who’d visited her tent a fortnight ago. She’d told him he’d have a fine family, offspring that’d go far in the world of politics, and he hadn’t believed a word of it. Well, that was his mistake, seeing as it was probably her one accurate prediction.

Lincoln. She’d recognized the name almost immediately. And she’d

known. She'd just known, that was all. Call it time-traveller's instinct, call it whatever.

*Samuel would turn out to be the father of the legendary Abraham, the President who'd blah blah blah something about Civil War blah blah blah fathers of democracy blah blah blah wore a big hat and got shot...*

Roz had been born nearly a millennium after the fall of the United States, so her knowledge of Great American Heroes was based entirely on the historical simcord dramas that the Empire would show whenever they wanted to make a point about the proud heritage of the human race. But her certainty that Samuel was one of the President's ancestors wasn't based on her knowledge of history. Yeah, call it time-traveller's instinct. That, and the fact that the TARDIS crew always seemed to end up around important people and events, for some reason even the Doctor didn't seem to understand properly. There must've been hundreds of Lincolns, even in a half-grown nation like this, but she would have bet her sister's fortune that she'd ended up in the same town as the most *significant* one.

Besides, Lincoln senior had Abraham's nose. A dead give-away.

And the moment she'd met him in that tent, and he'd chuckled at her predictions, she'd known. She'd started to figure out the one way to get out of this God-forsaken millennium. She had a plan. She had an escape route. And Samuel Lincoln was the key.

' *Io Ordo Io Ordo Ordo.* '

Daniel Tremayne had been in Catcher's cellar before, but back then it had just been a louse-ridden lumber-room, made up of stale air and splinters. Now it was different. He was sure it was bigger, for one thing. The walls looked like they'd been covered with marble, and there was some kind of platform in the middle of the baby-arse-smooth floor, muddy light glinting off the crystals that had been pushed into its surface. Daniel briefly wondered how much the thing was worth.

' *Ordo Ordo Io Ordo Io Io...* '

He didn't recognize the words the men were chanting.

Chanting, or whispering, or something between the two. There were half a dozen of them, standing ten, twenty feet away; their clothes were ordinary, shirts and jackets and shoes and pants, but their heads were hidden under crude sackcloth hoods, crumpled grey faces with

tiny slits for eyes. Daniel should've been alarmed – alarmed, hah, was that all? – but the words that were spilling from their throats wrapped themselves around his spine, soothing his nerves until, God, what was the point of worrying? He must have stood there for ten minutes or more, tucked out of sight in the shadows around the cellar entrance. Just staring. Just listening.

' *Io Ordo Ordo ...* '

And in the middle of it all was Catcher, the only one whose face wasn't hidden, standing next to the platform in his dull grey shirt and his high-collared jacket; and now Daniel looked at the thing in the middle of the floor, didn't it remind him of an altar? He thought of the stories he'd heard around New York, about the warlocks and the diabolists who got together in old crypts and graveyards, summoning up the children of Hell itself, spilling unholy blood on Christian altars and defecating in churches (whatever 'defecating' meant)...

Hah. But these weren't witches, were they? In Dill Village, someone had once told Daniel that there were people in the world who did even stranger things than the Satanists.

Freethinkers and scientists, not witch-doctors and mad monks.

'Like Freemasons,' he'd been told, but he hadn't understood the word. He'd even heard that the ones who ran the world, the Presidents and the Prime Ministers and the mad Englishmen, belonged to groups like that. The news hadn't surprised him at all.

That was it, then. Catcher and his friends weren't talking to bug-a-boos and hobgoblins. They were doing something else, something more modern, something scientific. Like what?

*And what are you doing here, Daniel Tremayne, down in the belly of the beast? Coming out of the cracks and getting yourself noticed. Just like the soft Revolutionaries, sticking their heads up so that the English could blow their brains out.*

'Listen,' said Catcher. And the men fell silent, and there was a moment's quiet –

– no there wasn't. Daniel could hear a kind of echo in the room, like parts of their words had stopped dead in mid-air, like they'd got stuck in the muddy light. ' *Ordo Io. Ordo Io Ordo Ordo.* '

'O,' said the echo. 'O.'

‘ *Io Ordo Io Io Ordo*,’ said Catcher.

‘I O I I O,’ said the echo.

One. Nought. One. One. Nought.

Daniel Tremayne wanted to cover his ears, but couldn’t.

Was this what he’d heard outside, the call, the thing that had dragged him here by the scruff of the neck? Was it just calling to him, or to Catcher, or to all of them?

‘ *Ordo Io. Ordo Io Io*.’

Nought one. Nought one one. Daniel Tremayne looked up, and saw that everything – colours, shapes, everything – was turning into the bastard numbers, blinking from nought to one and back again, Catcher’s words reshaping the world, giving the whole of creation a new program, chanted in ‘O’s and ‘I’s and noughts and ones. And somehow Daniel knew exactly what was going to happen, and in that brief moment of revelation he understood what had been calling him, and why he was here, and what it was he had to do, but a second passed and the thought was gone, pushed out of his head by ‘Io’s and

‘Ordo’s.

*I-SAID-WHAT-ARE-YOU-DOING-HERE-DANIEL*

*TREMAYNE?*

‘ *Ordo Io*,’ said Catcher, and the words became the world, the world became the words, the air spasmed like it was giving birth and something *arrived*.

It was a dead end. Erskine Morris uttered the second most obscene word he knew – he was keeping the worst until he was face-to-face with Catcher – and turned around, trying not to notice that his legs were trembling like Englishmen in a whorehouse. He could still hear words being hissed into his ear, and still had no idea where they were coming from. He was sure they were being spoken by human tongues – thunder and fornication, what other kind could speak? He was letting this charade get to him, by Christ – but it was hard to say where the whispers ended and the low humming of the corridor began.

‘Catcher!’ he called out, stumbling back along the passage.

‘It’s no use hiding there, man, I can see you! Come out and show yourself!’

That was a lie, of course. Erskine could only see flickers in the dim light, irritating shapes that lurked on the edges of his vision, hiding around the corners like giggling children.

Finally, one of the shadows decided to step forward.

Erskine Morris whirled around to face it, almost losing his balance and cracking his shoulder against a pillar.

‘ *Io Ordo Io*,’ the shape said.

‘Hellfire and shite!’ Erskine immediately recognized the man from his clothes and his slightly portly frame; Monroe, the fool’s name was, one of Catcher’s arse-lickers from the Renewal Society. Monroe’s face was obscured, though, covered by a crude grey sackcloth mask which – in Erskine’s view – improved his appearance no end. ‘Good grief, man, do you not know that there are laws against this kind of thing?’

‘ *Ordo Ordo Ordo Io Ordo*,’ said Monroe, no doubt coating the inside of his cowl with a layer of blustering spittle.

‘And you can stop that, as well –’ Erskine broke off in mid-complaint as he noticed several other forms, breaking away from the shadows and stepping out in front of him. Most of them were immediately recognizable, despite their hoods, as spineless and unimportant members of the Society. Men who couldn’t even hold a bottle and a half of Wilkeson’s and stand up straight. Catcher wasn’t among them.

‘All right, where is he? Where is the odious little absurdity?’

‘ *Ordo Io Io Ordo Io*,’ the men told him

‘Damnation!’ Erskine took a few steps towards them, hoping that his sheer size would intimidate them, but they didn’t even flinch. ‘Enough of this. Where’s Catcher?’

‘ *Ordo Ordo Io.* ’

In fact, not only were they not moving away, but they were moving towards him. Erskine felt himself take an involuntary step back.

‘ *Io Io Io Ordo Io Ordo Ordo.* ’

‘Of all the childish, irrational…’

Another step back.

‘ *Ordo Io.* ’

‘Damnation!’

And another.

‘ *Io Io Io Io Io Io Io Io* -’

Erskine Morris turned on his heel, and stalked away down another roundelled corridor. He refused to look back over his shoulder, telling himself that it wasn’t important whether the idiots followed him or not. They were trying to rattle him, that was all. Trying to stop him asking questions about their poxy

‘inner circle’. As if they could. Hah! As if.

He asked himself why he was walking so quickly, and couldn’t think of a decent answer. Imbeciles and mystics.

Nothing a good, sound, rational mind couldn’t deal with. And now that good, sound, rational mind just had to find the exit, a drink, and Matheson Catcher, in that order.

Then he turned the next corner, and walked right into something large, alive, and impossible.

The night she’d met Samuel Lincoln, Roz had dreamt of spinning golden spheres, of stovepipe hats and civil wars and witch-doctors and flowers that never died. By the time she’d woken up, every detail of the escape plan had been considered, calculated, and filed in her memory.

The only way out of this place. The only way to let the Doctor know where she was. The only way to summon a Time Lord.

The hardest part of the plan had been getting hold of the gun. There were simpler weapons, easier ways of killing someone, but a gun just seemed *right*, the only tool for the job.

It was like preparing a magic ritual, thought Roz, where all the pieces had to be in place for the plan to work, and all the right props had to be used. Time-traveller’s voodoo.

She’d mingled with the people from the other ‘attractions’, drifting from whisper to whisper until she’d found someone who knew where

to get hold of firearms, no questions asked. It had reminded her of one of the undercover operations she'd been involved in during her former life, and their unwillingness to talk reminded her that she'd never been any good at them then. The job had taken her the best part of a week.

The arms dealer had been a middle-aged man with vaguely Latin features, who seemed to talk to people without really noticing they were there. He'd struck Roz as the type who'd make a good narcotics dealer, a thousand years in the future, but the people of Woodwicke didn't seem to understand the concept of 'controlled substances'. Cocaine was legal, caffeine was legal, marijuana was not only legal but apparently used by the President – who *did* inhale – and vraxoin wouldn't be discovered for another two hundred years (when some idiot junkie out on the Cygnus Rim would get wasted one night and say to himself, the way only a junkie could: 'Hey, I know!

Let's snort dead alien!').

The gun had cost her everything she owned – which she had to admit was pretty damn cheap – plus a few odds and ends she'd taken from the house. It was a clumsy piece of machinery, even by eighteenth-century standards. 'Army surplus', she'd been told, a relic from the War of Independence. She'd spent some time practising out in the woods, using up most of what little ammunition she'd been able to afford, getting a feel for the weapon, learning how to fire the damned thing without being killed by the recoil.

She'd also spent some time hanging around the Lincoln house, an address that had taken her several days to worm out of the locals. There, she'd found the convenient little alleyway that opened up directly opposite the building, right by the church. The perfect site. Not only did the alley give her good cover, it also had an excellent view of the drawing– room window.

The clock in the church tower struck nine, listlessly, perhaps aware that no one cared about the time this close to Christmas.

No one was around on Paris Street. Roz Forrester crouched in the alley, slipped the gun out of her pouch, and prepared to shoot Samuel Lincoln.

## 2

## A Fistful of Timelines

Daniel Tremayne was running. At last, he was running.

Saw the alleyways flash past, saw the lights on Paris Street turn into yellow smears, saw a corner where he'd once been attacked by a drunken priest and a store where he'd stolen a whole pineapple, slipping it under his coat-of-rags, thinking, *they don't even notice me when I've got something this size bulging out of my shirt.* Daniel Tremayne, running through the places he'd been before, and all of them he recognized, and none of them made sense. It was like something –

*– the thing hadn't entered the basement, or even appeared in a magical puff of smoke. It had been born into Catcher's house, kicking its way out of the very stuff of creation –*

– like something had reached into his head and pulled away all the strings that held his memories together. People were on Eastern Walk, people who stared, people who noticed him. He thought about calling out to them, warning them about the thing that was filling up Catcher's house, but his head was already full of the whispers, and there was no room in there for putting words together any more.

Saw that the stones of the street were closer to his face than they should have been. Didn't think it mattered much. He kind-of-remembered feeling something under his foot, tripping up on some piece of garbage at the entrance to an alley. The pain that cracked across his forehead when he hit the ground might as well have been happening to someone else, and the splintering noise might as well have come from somewhere a hundred miles away.

Suddenly he could see a picture of dirt-shrouded men in a field of snow, and Daniel recognized it as a memory, knocked out of the back of his skull and into the space behind his eyes.

There was the sound of music, shot through with gunfire, like he was listening to the carnival at the end of the world.

*– he'd seen a million futures, worlds held together by webs of machines, mapping out civilization as a tapestry of noughts and ones. Everything in the known universe, converted into the simplest of pulses, on-off on-off –*

All the sounds and all the pictures had melted down into the noughts and the ones. There was nothing else, except for something big and black and empty, but Daniel Tremayne didn't know the word 'unconscious' so he didn't know what to call it.

Marielle Duquesne lashed out against the machine, jamming her fist into its cheek, and it was only when her knuckles failed to bleed that she knew she was dreaming. The cracks she'd made in the thing's head formed a near-perfect circle, a flower of chipped plaster against the smooth surface of its face.

'Knock knock,' grinned the machine.

Duquesne hesitated, fists still clenched.

'Do I take it that this is my cue to wake up?' she asked.

'Knock knock,' it repeated, and the dream fell to pieces.

'Come in,' said Duquesne, rubbing her eyes.

Even before the cabin door opened, she knew the caller had to be her contact in America, the sentinel – some would say

'spy' – that her employers had set to watch over New York.

She guessed it was nine o'clock, or thereabouts. She'd meant to sleep for only an hour or so after dinner, readying herself for her first trip into the towns, but the dream had pulled her deeper into sleep than she'd wanted to go.

'My lady,' said Tourette, removing his hat with an unnecessary flourish.

She considered offering him her hand, then decided that he'd probably think she was flirting, and just sat up with the bedsheet wrapped around her torso. Tourette's body was thin and angular, with a face to match, his chiselled features leading him to the false conclusion that he had some kind of regal charm about him. His wardrobe had obviously been designed to reflect this, his bright velvet jacket and oversized cravat making him the most conspicuous agent Duquesne had ever been forced to work with.

'Good evening, Monsieur Tourette,' she said, mechanically, as she slid out of the bed. Tourette didn't seem at all intimidated by the fact that she was only half-dressed, which irked her slightly. He obviously felt that morality was for the peasants. 'You bring news from the towns?'

'I do, my lady, I do indeed.' Tourette bowed extravagantly, and for no immediately obvious reason. 'For strange things are afoot there, and those of superstitious and irrational demeanours are claiming devilry

is at work. These past nights, there have been dreams both weird and unfathomable amongst the townsfolk. A sensation of unease has swept across these harbours, like a great wind of... er... unease.'

Duquesne gritted her teeth. The colonies were littered with idiot agents like Tourette, 'expendables' who knew nothing but were led to believe that they knew everything. Duquesne politely turned her back on him as she dragged her chemise over her shoulders. 'Your last dispatch to the Directory mentioned the Renewal Society...?'

'Indeed, my lady. And since that time, I have infiltrated the local lodge of that group, in the hope of hearing some rumour amongst the enlightened. My cover is faultless, as one might expect from an agent of my experience, and they have accepted me as a man of great learning and philosophical insight.'

'I don't doubt it, Monsieur Tourette.' Duquesne tried to smile sweetly as she crossed the cabin floor, barefoot on the splintered boards.

'Even amongst the rationalist minds of the Society, there are feelings of ill-omen,' Tourette continued. 'Many members have begun to discuss ancient and absurd magics as if they were founded in science, and secret meetings are held that smack of Freemasonry. Some in the town suspect the rationalists of being the cause of their ill-feeling, though they cannot seem to explain why. I, myself, have been spat at in the street.'

'Ah, good.'

'My lady...?'

'Good that you have so, ah, successfully infiltrated the Society. But these secret meetings...'

'I have not yet been invited to any of them, my lady.'

'I see.'

Tourette looked crestfallen, like the dog that had failed to bring back the bone. 'But it is only a matter of time, my lady, I assure you. I have the trust of the Society.'

Duquesne stepped out through the cabin door and on to the deck of the ship, Tourette at her heels. 'I'm sure you do,' she said, lips still forced into a smile. 'I'm sure you do.'

No one else on the street. No witnesses, thought Roz, crouching in the alley by the church. The nearest human sounds came from around the corner, where the man from the general store was having a loud argument with someone about the legality of his opening hours.

Quiet enough.

Abraham Lincoln. Born in the United States of America in... what was the year? Eighteen-hundred-and-something, going by the Empire's version of history. Lincoln. Focus on that name, Forrester. Something about all men being created equal. Something to do with Civil War. Remember those simcords? Full of blood and guts and triumph and glory. Not the way the Empire would pay tribute to a loser. One of history's heroes, then. Someone *significant*.

Two minutes since the clock had struck nine, and Roz hadn't breathed out since. She knew the routine by now.

Samuel Lincoln would appear in the drawing-room window every night at around this time, cross the room, sit at his desk...

But if Samuel Lincoln was going to die, then little Abraham would never exist. No more Civil War, whatever it had been about. No more Presidents with warts, no more simcord dramas. One bullet, one careful shot. Thick black marker-pen over the pages of history. 'Roz Forrester was here.'

*Killing time. A mystic ritual to summon a Time Lord, involving the sacrifice of an innocent on the altar of history.*

*Four-dimensional voodoo. The same method the Hellenic Atlanteans used to summon the Chronovores, but how the Sheol do you know a thing like that, Roslyn Forrester? What are you, psychic or something?*

She unexpectedly remembered her botched attempt to kill SLEEPY on Yemaya 4, and wondered what her subconscious could possibly be trying to tell her.

A shadow appeared behind the drawing-room curtain, a human shape framed against the orange lamplight. Sitting target, she thought. Practice, she thought. She checked that everything was in place, that the ammunition was loaded properly, that there was no safety-catch she hadn't noticed.

One shot. No different from any other. She'd shot at people before. Mostly she'd missed, but this was different. Sitting target. Practice. No

problem.

The shadow of Samuel Lincoln moved across to his desk, and – presumably – opened one of the drawers. Roz levelled the gun. The American Way; remember when the Empire terraformed Mogar and Murtaugh and the Prion system? How they wanted everyone to remember the spirit of the frontier, showing westerns where the cowboys looked suspiciously multi-cultural and the Indians looked suspiciously non-terrestrial? The ghost of the Wild West, the spirit of liberty and gun-law nesting down in the foundations of the USA. Just another killing, just one of many.

One bullet.

One careful shot.

Samuel Lincoln sat down at his desk, putting his head directly in her line of fire.

Roz Forrester's second-to-last thought before she pulled the trigger was: *shoot first and ask questions later.*

Roz Forrester's last thought before she pulled the trigger was: *shoot first and don't ask questions.*

Then her vision was filled with something huge and white, bigger than the flash of the gun-barrel, bigger than she could even imagine, filling up the whole universe and blotting out every sense she had.

*It was –*

*It was just –*

Erskine Morris closed his eyes, and his vision was filled with a dozen fluorescent scratches and swirls that danced across the insides of his eyelids. He could feel something wrapping itself around his shoulders, and it was warm to the touch. He closed his eyes tighter, making the shapes leap and crackle like straws in a fire.

A word was growing in his belly, like a magical incantation that would send the damned monster back to Hell, but however hard he strained he couldn't force it up into his mouth. Astonishingly, he began to walk forward, feeling his face push against the beast's soft underbelly. Trying to prove that it couldn't possibly be there, perhaps. He felt liquid skin ripple in front of him, and heard the sound of gently tearing flesh, the layers of the thing's body opening up for him

Revolting notion. Ridiculous notion.

*It was just –*

*It was just that –*

And he could have sworn that the flesh was closing up again behind him, the creature sealing him into its carcass.

Absurdly, it was only now that he truly began to panic, and the whispering flooded into his ears. Music, like carnival music. A voice? A woman's voice?

*It was just that it didn't make sense.*

And finally, the word in his belly erupted out through his throat.

'Buggery!' he shrieked.

Suddenly, his face was exposed to the air again, and he realized – with more than a little disgust – that he must have walked right through the monstrosity. Walked through it and out the other side. He opened his eyes.

'Congratulations,' said Catcher, flatly.

Erskine Morris blinked. He was still in the man's labyrinth, but the corridors were behind him now, having led him to a wide room made up of the same indented walls. In the dead centre of the floor was some kind of table, its design peculiar and unsettling; it almost looked like a mushroom, an organic thing, a six-sided dais topped by a column of pure crystal.

Catcher himself stood at the far side of the dais, still in his drab little jacket and brass-knuckled shoes, while all around him stood the other members of the 'inner circle', faces covered by their ridiculous hoods. Their heads were bowed.

Like bloody monks, thought Erskine, and he found himself identifying them by their physiques. The fat one was Walter Monroe, the broker. William Beaumont the book-keeper, George Mistral the layabout. O'Toole. Van Owen. Grey, faceless people. He tried to picture them with fish-gutting knives, eyes blazing with Satanic fury. He very nearly laughed.

Something brushed against his neck. With a start, he realized that the

monster was still hovering in the passage behind him, squirming impatiently.

Erskine met Catcher's gaze. The eyes were cold and empty.

For a brief and fleeting moment, he thought he understood why.

'You've proved yourself to be a man of Reason,' Catcher said, as if that explained everything, and reached out to untie Erskine's wrists. Erskine tried to tell him what he thought of him, but all that came out of his throat was a sickly spluttering noise.

The harbour was a hundred yards across the water, a low wall of buildings that shielded the towns beyond from the sea.

From here, all you could see were dim constellations of lamplight, forming imaginary patterns against the backcloth of the evening. On-off on-off. Signals in the darkness.

What kind of darkness?

'My lady?' Tourette was still by Duquesne's side, entirely incapable of knowing when he wasn't wanted. 'My lady, I wished to know if it were now your intention to enter the towns yourself...?'

'I have already crossed the Atlantic to be here, Monsieur Tourette. Having done so, it would be a pity for me to remain on this ship and not see the local sights.'

Tourette, however, had little or no understanding of sarcasm. 'But there may be dangers, my lady. For one who is unfamiliar with the customs of the brutish American people –'

'I appreciate your concern, Monsieur. However, you must understand that I possess certain talents that even a...

professional... like yourself can lack. There may be a *caillou* here, *non*?' This is his territory, Duquesne thought, and he wants to keep me away from it. He probably hopes he can get to the bottom of all this by himself and get promoted by the Shadow Directory. Shallow idiot.

'I beg you, my lady –'

'Tourette!' She forgot the 'Monsieur' that time. 'I promise you, should I have any difficulties, I shall be in direct contact with you. Or with *another* local agent.'

That had put him in his place. For once, the man seemed lost for words.

'If there's anything else...?' Duquesne prompted.

'No, my lady.' Tourette began to shuffle backwards across the deck, his back hunched as if he were unsure whether to bow again or not. By the time he reached the part of the deck to which his rowing-boat was tethered, he was practically bent double. 'I wish you good fortune in your endeavours –'

' *Au revoir*,' Duquesne told him, dryly.

She watched the rowing-boat drift off towards the shore.

Once Tourette had vanished into the dark, and his gruntings and pantings had faded away – the sound of a man who finds it difficult to come to terms with a piece of machinery as complex as an oar, Duquesne thought – her gaze was drawn back to the lights of New York State.

Dreams and ill omens. Rationalists and magicians. Out beyond the harbour, an accidental clockwork of secrets, a mechanism of plots and sub-plots, waiting to be wound; she could sense that much from here. The burning in her spine began again, the nerves tying themselves into ugly little bundles, and she felt like an animal waiting for a storm.

Thunderheads in the dark.

History waiting to happen.

*Bang*.

Roz Forrester didn't feel the hand on her shoulder, pulling her off-balance as she squeezed the trigger. She barely noticed that her aim had been ruined, that the bullet had ripped open the sky above the balconies of the Lincoln house. Her senses only returned to her after she'd finished toppling over, back crunching against the ground.

There were shouts from along the street, alarmed residents and passers-by, but nobody seemed to know where the shot had come from or where it had been aimed. She thought she heard someone shouting 'the redcoats are coming', but she could have imagined it. In his drawing-room, Samuel Lincoln pulled himself to his feet and hurried over to the window, entirely unaware that – in some other

world – he'd just been assassinated.

Roz saw the face hovering over her, and repressed the urge to salute.

'Thought that'd get your attention,' she said.

The Doctor scowled at her. His hand was still on her shoulder, restraining her, as if worried that she might still try to kill someone.

'That was stupid,' he said.

'No. It was a safe bet.' Roz hauled herself upright, flecks of frost sliding off the plastic-coated undersuit of her old Adjudicator's uniform. 'Time's Champion. You said you had to protect history, no matter how it went. Those were the rules.

Remember?'

The Doctor took his hand off her shoulder, but said nothing.

'Suppose Samuel Lincoln had died,' Roz explained.

'President Lincoln would never have been born. Serious damage to the time-stream, or whatever you call it. You couldn't allow that. You'd notice the damage, you'd have to come and try to stop it. You had to come here. And you did.

This was the only way of letting you know where to find me.

Where've you been, anyway? And where's Chris?'

Nearby, the man from the general store started shouting something about calling the police.

'There's just one little problem,' said the Doctor.

'Yeah?'

'Yes.' He got to his feet, his short frame seeming to stretch all the way to the moon. 'Abraham Lincoln was born in a log cabin in Kentucky, not New York. And his father's name was Thomas.'

There was a silence as big as the world.

'It's starting to rain,' Roz said eventually. 'We'd better get out of here.'

Staying in the TARDIS, thought Christopher Rodonanté Cwej, was like

spending a week in an Argolin holiday complex; you knew there had to be a million interesting things to do there, but it wasn't until you got really bored that you realized you couldn't remember what any of them were.

Chris was no longer worried about Roz. Partly, this was because of the Doctor's constant assurances – 'She's all right';

'She'll be fine'; 'She can look after herself – but mostly it was because the human brain can't worry about something for weeks on end without just giving up and shrugging.

No, scratch that. The human brain can't *consciously* worry about something for weeks on end without just giving up and shrugging. He'd never admit it to anyone, of course, but some nights... well, he'd fall asleep and find himself searching for Roz in an ancient monochrome city. He'd end up running through endless identical alleyways, finally reaching a throne-room painted in the dull grey of eternity, where he'd meet a white-bearded giant of a man who never answered a single question; and he'd wake up with Roz Forrester waiting behind his eyelids again, ready to show her face whenever he blinked.

But now – as long as he stayed awake, at least – he was no longer worried. He was just bored.

Once the Doctor had disappeared through the doors on another of his secret expeditions, Chris had started exploring the TARDIS interior, poking his nose into the cracks and cupboards of what he called 'the humans' corridor', where he and Roz had been quartered ever since the Doctor had got his old TARDIS back. There, he'd stumbled across a doorway that he was sure hadn't existed in the 'other' TARDIS. The room beyond was unfurnished, as if its owner hadn't needed the usual human comforts, and boxes were lined up against the walls with horrifying neatness and precision. The possessions of a former traveller, Chris surmised, so why hadn't they been cleared out?

Now he rooted through the boxes with a startling lack of shame, prodding at the contents and averting his eyes from the various 'women's things' he came across. Then he found a number of 'men's things', too, which struck him as odd. Was this room used by two people, or...?

He suddenly found himself thinking of the few androgynous alien species he'd heard of, creatures that veered from male to female and

back again in a matter of moments.

The thought of one of them travelling in the TARDIS made him feel vaguely uncomfortable. Aliens in the TARDIS. No reason why not, he supposed, but the idea of the Doctor having an alien as a companion just made him feel peculiar, somehow. Like the feeling you get when someone you've known all your life gets a new and unexpected haircut.

Most of the things in the boxes were human artefacts, but there seemed to be no connection between any of them, as if the owner had desperately tried to understand human culture (or to understand being human?) by collecting as many odds and ends as he/she/it could Finally, at the bottom of the very last box – beneath a mysterious catering receipt for 36,000

sandwiches, and a boxed set of coins celebrating the re-coronation of Queen Elizabeth II (the only re-coronation in British history, the accompanying leaflet said, though it diplomatically failed to mention why it had been necessary) –

he found the most interesting item of all.

Originally it had been a simple computer, light enough to hold in one hand; but so many foreign elements had been added that it was impossible to identify the design. The hardware must have come from a dozen different time-zones, and quite possibly as many different civilizations, but all of them had been tacked together with the same brand of micro-thin wiring.

'Time-Lord technology,' Chris told himself. 'Has to be. If they can figure out a way to speak every language, they must be able to make a lead that fits any hardware. Makes sense.'

What puzzled him, though, was the cord that led out of the stripped-down terrulian diode-charger at the back of the machine, a cord ending in an unusual hexagonal pin.

Obviously the computer was supposed to interface with something. Chris wandered around the ship for a while, poking his nose into every door he came to and occasionally going 'ooh' or 'wow' at what he saw there, looking for a hole that the pin might fit. He tried everything, from the fault locator to the large box-shaped computer-bank labelled PRIME that sat in a corner just outside the console room. He even chased after the food machine as it trundled along the ship's passages, inspecting it for unusual orifices. No joy.

Just as he was about to give up, it came to him

‘Wait a minute,’ he said aloud, determined that the world should hear his brilliant investigative mind in action. ‘If Time-Lord technology can fit any system…’

Chris left the sentence tantalizingly unfinished. He held up the computer, pointing the lead towards the corridor wall outside his own quarters, finally touching the pin against the surface of a roundel. Slowly and gracefully, the roundel opened up like an iris. Something on the other side grabbed the pin and sucked it into the winking, blinking TARDIS

systems.

‘Can I just take this opportunity to say something?’ Chris addressed himself. ‘You’re brilliant.’

‘I would point out, however, that all you actually did was put a plug in,’ said a voice.

With a start, Chris looked up. The next roundel along had split in half across its centre, and the two halves were now quivering slightly, forming…

… a pair of lips?

‘Is there something wrong?’ asked the mouth.

‘Er,’ said Chris. ‘Er.’

‘What do you see?’ asked Matheson Catcher.

Erskine Morris cast his eyes around the room, trying to avoid looking back at the horror lurking out in the corridor.

‘Whahhg?’ he heard himself say.

Catcher fixed his little round eyes on his prey. Prey?

Damnation, Morris, you’re letting the fornicating idiot get to you. ‘You are aware, of course, that the human species has reached a critical point in its development.’

Erskine nodded dumbly. Catcher joined in with the nod.

‘The Age of Reason is the single most significant occurrence in the

entire history of humanity, Mr Morris. For millennia, mankind has been bound by ignorance and superstition. We have been at the mercy of chaos. At the mercy of Cacophony.'

'Cacophony?' Erskine queried, without thinking.

'Cacophony. The spirit of the irrational. The force that makes sane men believe in magic. That makes us as hysterical as women.' Catcher was still nodding, like a machine that someone had forgotten to turn off. 'But we have it in our power to end this tyranny of nature, Mr Morris. To bend the terrible forces of Cacophony to our will. We have a responsibility to make this world a world of Reason, built by rationalists, not by charlatans or jungle-gods or witch-doctors.'

Erskine nodded again, but on the inside he was saying: *Reason? Have you seen that, that thing out in the corridor?*

*Christ, man, is that what you call Reason?*

And perhaps Catcher knew what he was thinking, because he turned and looked the monstrosity straight in the metaphorical eye. 'A creature of havoc, Mr Morris. An agent of Cacophony. But by mastering the powers of Reason, the beast has been tamed. Subverted to the will of the... to our will.'

Erskine was half-expecting the cursed man to shout 'All Hail Reason!' at that point, but instead there was just a moment's silence. He suddenly realized that Catcher was expecting some kind of reaction.

So he just nodded again.

'This is the purpose of our group,' Catcher concluded.

'This should be the purpose of the Renewal Society, and of every other such society that this nation has produced. To make our Earth a New Jerusalem of science and stability. The world is balanced between Reason and the abyss of reasonlessness, Mr Morris. We have a duty to the future.'

He made a mechanical motion with his arm, indicating the room around them. 'This is what Reason can achieve,' Catcher concluded. 'And Reason will remake the world.'

The thunderheads opened, spilling out heat and fire and bad fortune. More than light. A flash of fate. And had there been a gunshot? Duquesne could have sworn she heard a gunshot, exploding out across

New York.

There was a low groan from below her feet, or perhaps a hundred groans in chorus. She looked across the deck. There were two seamen to starboard, faceless and nameless members of the crew, engaged in a heated debate about the relative merits of prostitution. They hadn't noticed it. The flashpoint had passed, and they hadn't noticed a thing.

But below deck...

She slid across the boards as the first drops of rain began to fall, stopping before the hatch that led down into the cargo hold. She glanced back at the mariners. They weren't watching her, hadn't even noticed her. Duquesne tugged back the bolt and pulled open the hatch.

She was ready for the smell. Ready enough that she didn't have to cover her face, or shut the hatch again, or even turn away. Even when she climbed down the ladder, she kept breathing normally, determined to remain in control of her senses.

There were perhaps eighty blacks in the cargo hold. Most of them were laid out along the floor, backs slick with spilled water and human waste, though a few of the smaller ones were loaded onto the shelves that had been bolted to the walls. The waves lapped against the side of the ship in perfect synchronization with the tides of heat and fever that washed across the hold, a living spectrum of body-scent and branded flesh. If the cargo made any sound, Duquesne didn't hear it, but their lips moved in harmony with the rhythm of the blood, the sweat, the bile, the salt, the sea, the rain, the *smell*...

Then her spine was alight again, tongues of ozone-flavoured heat forming tight spirals around her backbone.

Every inch of her skin was damp with sweat, and every ounce of flesh could taste the rotting dampness of wooden walls that had been christened with splashes of blood and spit and piss.

There was a woman chained to a shelf, five feet above the floor. Her eyes met Duquesne's. They were white and empty.

Medieval magicians had starved themselves, flogged themselves, exposed themselves to alchemical flames, thinking that it would purge their bodies and purify their souls.

The pain and the hunger made them more receptive, more sensitive to

the ebb and flow of the cosmos. Or so they'd said.

There were perhaps eighty blacks in the cargo hold.

The pain and the hunger. Scent of delirium.

They could feel it. Just as Duquesne could feel it, corkscrewing up her back.

*She had once met the priests of the Temple of Hermes, who claimed descendance from the mythical King Priam and believed that their family line had been instigated by the gods themselves...*

... she had felt it then.

*She had seen the High Lama of the holy ghanta in the foothills of the Kunlun Mountains, who could lift objects with the merest flicker of his will, a storm of stones levitating around his body like the seven planets around the sun...*

... she had felt it then.

*She had heard the stories of Hsen Ling, the 'mad Chinaman of Vienna', who told of his abduction by the trickster-god No Cha, and how he beat the deity in an unearthly game of cards...*

... and she had felt it then. Each of them had been a *caillou*, the word her employers in the Shadow Directory used to describe an individual around whom the world itself would shift and change, one so out-of-tune with the natural order of the universe that even history would warp and buckle around him. *Caillou*. Maker of distractions. Changer of rules. A pebble dropped into a pond.

'Can you feel him?' Duquesne asked the woman-in-chains, suddenly realizing that she was speaking in French, and wondering if the woman even understood English.

Dead eyes looked back at her.

' *Caillou*,' Duquesne said. 'He has arrived.'

And the fire burned her spine like a fuse, reaching her neck, igniting every neural pathway, heightening every sense.

And the smell was inhuman. And she passed out.

'Attempted murder!'

They were stomping through the wooded areas that bordered the town, those small expanses of green that marked the boundaries of the civilized world, where the planners and the architects lurked in the shadows and waited for their moment to come. It had taken them ten wet minutes to get this far. The Doctor pushed his way through the undergrowth like a force of nature, faster than his little legs should have been able to carry him, Roz maliciously trampling on the nettles as she kept up the pace.

'Attempted murder, my arse. You were supposed to stop me.'

'And what if I hadn't been there?'

'You're always there!'

'You couldn't be sure of that.'

'Yes I could. Because you had to protect the time-line. All right, so I got the wrong man.' Not the first time I would have shot an innocent bystander, she thought, but she didn't say it.

'There's no such thing as the right man. Not when you're pointing a loaded weapon at him. Or doesn't thirtieth-century legal procedure cover these little details?'

She was about to snarl her reply when the obvious question finally hit her. 'Wait a minute. If you hadn't stopped me, I wouldn't have done any damage –'

'No *damage*?'

'No damage to the time-line. Samuel Lincoln isn't important.'

The Doctor didn't say a word, didn't even scowl.

'So, if I wouldn't have changed anything if I'd hit him, how come you turned up in time to stop me? What I'm saying is –'

'Is irrelevant.' He batted at an overhanging branch with his walking-cane, as much to punish the cane as to push back the branch, perhaps irritated that it couldn't keep the rain off in the same way that his umbrella would have done. Even so, most of the rain seemed to be missing him somehow, as if the droplets knew that he wouldn't grow no matter how much they watered him 'You could have killed that man. Not even on the battlefield, not even in the heat of the moment. Killed him in cold blood. You had no guarantee that I'd be there.'

‘I did what I had to!’

‘What you *had* to?’ The words rolled out of his mouth in the same way that thunder rolls across the savannah, and Roz instinctively found herself looking up at the rainclouds.

‘Do you know what it’s like to be trapped like this?’ she demanded. ‘Stranded, for weeks on end, months on end, left in the middle of some dead-end no-hope planet with no way of getting away from it, and no way of even knowing if you’re going to be spending the rest of your life there?’

‘I have a place in mind,’ the Doctor muttered.

‘A planet where you fit in so badly that they take one look at you and decide you’re either a criminal or part of a freak-show?’

‘I have a place in mind,’ he repeated.

Roz ignored him. ‘Listen, I’ve been through this kind of shit before, but this place is different. Do you know what it is that kills you? It’s not the way they look at you, or the abuse you get, or the bastards who want to know if you’ve ever eaten anyone. If I thought everybody hated me, I could live with it.

I’m used to that by now.

‘I’ll tell you what it is. It’s the not knowing. I don’t know how I’m supposed to act here, and neither do they. They can’t even decide whether I’m human or not. Some of them treat me like an animal. Some of them think I’m some kind of exotic mystery. Some of them, Goddess help them, actually talk to me. This place doesn’t have any rules, and I used to be a cop, I can’t live without rules. I’ve seen slaves dragged half-naked through the streets by their chains, I’ve seen black servants dressed in suits like they were pets, I’ve even met a few free Africans out in the slums They wouldn’t speak to me. They thought I was an Englishman’s *whore*.’

She practically shouted the last word into his ear, and it was enough to stop even him.

‘It’s the not knowing. Not knowing whether the next person I meet’s going to feel sorry for me, or just try to kill me. And by now, I can’t remember which is supposed to be worse.

OK?’

There was an embarrassed silence.

‘I’m sorry,’ the Doctor finally announced.

‘I have to get out of this place.’

‘I understand.’

‘I did what I had to.’

He opened his mouth to reply, then thought better of it, and just pointed with his walking-cane. Up ahead, Roz could see the trees thin out, the ground dipping into a steep slope, leading down to a low glade. ‘There’s a lot of truth in what you said,’ the Doctor told her as they walked towards it.

‘Historical truth. This is a brand-new nation. At the moment, the people here still think, act, and speak like the English and the Dutch. They don’t have a culture to call their own.

America hasn’t decided yet whether it’s a nation of philosophers or a nation of barbarians.’

‘Yeah, well, I vote barbarians.’

He frowned. ‘It’s never that simple. Soon, the Civil War will come. The guidelines of the society will be laid down, for better or worse, and everyone will know how they’re supposed to behave. The philosophers will act like philosophers. The barbarians will act like barbarians. Until then...’

He trailed off, and shrugged.

The glade at the bottom of the slope was unremarkable, a crater-like circle of trees carpeted by autumn’s left-overs. The moon was bright enough to illuminate the layer of dampened frost on the ground, interrupted only by the dark outline of a wooden-panelled police box.

At the time, Roz thought nothing of the way the Doctor paused before he inserted the TARDIS key into the lock, nor of the strange patterns the rainwater made as it trickled down the surface of the door. It was only when he thrust the key into place that she noticed anything.

The lock split wide open. He removed the key, and the lock sealed itself together again. Roz froze.

‘That’s not natural,’ she said.

The Doctor tucked the walking-cane under his arm and reached out with his other hand, touching the surface of the TARDIS. Then he kept reaching. His hand sank into the exterior. The sides of the machine buckled as the split expanded, and the front opened up like a ripe peach.

Like a ripe peach?

Slowly, the Doctor raised his eyes to the heavens. Perhaps, up there in the night sky, he glimpsed the other kind of darkness, hiding behind the winter rainclouds. Or perhaps not.

'Stop doing this!' he shouted, but the sky refused to answer.

Chris Cwej cleared his throat, wondering how one should address a disembodied facial feature. 'Listen,' he tried. 'I hope you don't mind me asking this or anything, but... look, are you *supposed* to be just a mouth?'

In response, yet another roundel opened, revealing a huge eye on the far side. It stared.

'Oh, yuk,' he said. 'That's gross.'

The eye closed obligingly.

'Wait a minute,' Chris said, suddenly realizing what he was talking to 'Are you the TARDIS?'

'Ah. I don't believe it's possible to communicate with the TARDIS, at least, not directly. Its thought processes are entirely alien to the organic psyche, and its mental capacity is beyond the comprehension of anything other than another TARDIS.' The voice was cultured, metallic, male without being masculine. Almost mournful, but definitely not human.

'In colloquial English, one might as well try talking to the whole of Birmingham. Not my own choice of metaphor, however. I don't believe we've been introduced.'

'My name's Chris. Chris Cwej. So, who...?'

'I serve as an interface. A piece of software, nothing more.

A ghost in the machine, perhaps. Created by one of the previous occupants of this craft.' Was that really a wistful tone in its voice? ' *He*

suffered a period of some confinement here, and spent that time attempting to cultivate his understanding of organic cultures. He learnt a great deal from the ship's systems, using me as his... pardon me, I have to locate the appropriate term. Go-between? Yes. I was his go-between. I was also responsible for the customization of several core systems within the TARDIS, acting on his command.'

Confinement? Funny way of putting it. 'This previous occupant. Was he, er, alien, at all?'

'On occasion. His default form was cybernetic, however.'

The voice hesitated, as if wondering how much to tell. 'It is possible that the Doctor is unaware of my continued existence.

When I was engineered, I believe it was assumed that I would cease to function once my original user had departed...'

'Wait a minute,' said Chris. 'You said "customization".

You mean, you can shift the TARDIS around, any way I... er, any way the user wants it? All he has to do is say?'

'I fear not. I may only report. Forge a link, as it were, between the user and the subconscious depths of the ship's systems. Except for those protocols which determine my physical attributes –' and the wall grew a temporary pair of nostrils, just to make a point '– alterations to the ship's structure may only be made using the input terminal.'

Chris looked down at the keyboard of the computer, an antique QWERTY job that someone had spilt coffee over at some point in its existence. He nodded to himself. 'So what happens if I do this, for instance?'

He tried tapping an alpha-numeric sequence into the keyboard. Nothing happened.

'That was fortunate,' said the mouth.

'Fortunate?'

'Fortunate that we weren't having this discussion in the Eighth Door section. You appear to have turned it inside-out and pushed it into Hilbert-space.'

‘Oh.’ Chris blinked a couple of times. ‘I kind of assumed you’d stop something like that from happening.’

‘Not within my functional parameters, I regret to say.’

‘Oh. So, can I put it back?’

‘No. I would advise, however, that you re-position one of the corridors to close the gap your command has created. The ship is beginning to lose its aesthetic integrity.’

‘Got it.’ Cwej peered at the tiny LCD screen that had been connected to the keyboard, but it just seemed to be displaying a series of telephone numbers, interspersed with random zeroes and ones. ‘Er, how do I do that?’

‘I fear it’s not my place to say. As I believe I mentioned, I may only report. It’s not within my functional parameters to understand the operating system.’

‘What?’

‘Here it comes,’ said the mouth, quite calmly. And everything went black.

**3**

**Thought About Saving the World,**

**Couldn’t Be Bothered**

They were coming out of the walls, out of the floors, out of every nook or cranny that seemed dark and unimportant enough to spawn them. Fingers like razors, muscles of tin.

Moving along the corridors with an awkward, lurching gait, like children’s toys whose batteries had run down.

They fed from the ship’s structure in the boot-cupboards, and played dice with the universe in the cloisters. Creations, phantasms, aberrations...

... why be coy? Monsters. They were monsters, that was all.

The ground was slippery with frost and rainwater.

*The ground was slippery with blood and gunpowder.*

Daniel Tremayne crouched in an alleyway off Burr Street, pulling the soaking blanket tight around his stick-thin body, letting the rain spit in his face. He couldn't remember where he'd found the blanket, but then he couldn't remember much about anything; not where he'd run to, not where he'd been.

He guessed he'd spent most of the last hour here in the alley, down in the shadows, with a big bloody gash across the top of his head.

*Columns of soldiers, diseased bodies rotted and falling to pieces as they marched through the winter.*

When he'd fallen and cracked his head on the ground, when he'd heard music in his skull and dreamed of the carnival going past, when he'd seen the soft people in their carnival clothes...

*The soldiers' uniforms were covered in dirt and vomit. 'Up the Revolution,' one of them had said, and his comrades had laughed. They hadn't thought it was funny, but they'd laughed.*

... it'd been a warning. Like he'd needed one. Should've been out of the town by now, Daniel Tremayne. Should've been a dozen, a hundred, a thousand miles away.

Daniel Tremayne had been only so-high when the War of Independence had ended. Smaller than so-high, no bigger than a baby. The War, when all the soft people had decided to stick their heads up and get involved with the way the world was run, making their own bloody laws, inventing their own bloody taxes.

*Blood and gunpowder.*

And most of them had gotten themselves killed, because, God, what else can you expect if you get yourself noticed like that? What else do you get, Daniel Tremayne, for sticking your head into other people's cellars, and are you listening to what I'm telling you?

*Diseased and rotted.*

They said they'd won the War, the soft Revolutionaries and the men whose souls they'd bought to fight for them. Daniel thought of the half-people he'd seen, skeletons dressed in mud and diarrhoea. Hah. And they called that winning, did they?

*Dirt and vomit.*

He'd been *so-high*, or less. He remembered so much of it.

How come? Shit. Did it matter?

Daniel dropped the blanket, started moving along the alley, heading God-knew-where. Anywhere, anywhere that wasn't near Catcher's house. But the call was in his head, and he could still hear the whispers in the dark, trying to lure him back. And he knew they'd never leave him alone.

There were many questions. All of them seemed perfectly sensible, until they were spoken out loud, when they suddenly became pointless and insignificant. For example:

'But... Catcher, where in the name of the old bastard King *is* this place?'

'This is my house.' A note of surprise in the man's voice, as if he didn't understand why anyone would have to ask.

'What? It's... well, it's smaller on the outside.'

'With the correct tools, a man of Reason may even bend the mundane dimensions to his will.' Catcher seemed convinced of the logic behind his words, despite the fact that he was quite obviously talking gibberish. 'Naturally, it is well within the power of the Watchmakers to supply such tools.'

Watchmakers? Erskine opened his mouth to ask, but it hardly seemed worthwhile. Why question any of it? Good God (there, he'd thought about the G-word), he was in screaming doo-lally Hell. What could he expect? Coherency?

'Are you a man of Reason?' Catcher asked.

Yes, thought Erskine. Yes, by Saint Buggery, but this isn't a Reasonable world anymore, not like it was an hour ago. He glanced at the monstrosity, slithering in and out of the shadows on the far side of the room. But I am a rationalist, by Christ, and rationalism tells me –

It tells me –

*Hades and copulation, what does it tell me?*

And he realized – in a moment of terrible, all-consuming horror – that he couldn't remember, that he'd probably never be able to remember

ever again.

‘Yes,’ he said, flatly. ‘I’m a man of Reason.’ And he tried to ignore the abomination as it giggled like a little girl.

‘What about Chris?’

They gazed into the abyss; the abyss gazed back and giggled stupidly. Every now and then, a piece of furniture – a tea-chest, a Louis XV chair, or a hatstand – would drift past the fissure that had, in a previous life, been the TARDIS

doorway.

‘I said, what about Chris?’

Roz’s fingers dug into the Doctor’s shoulder. He looked up abruptly, and her face became paralysed in mid-scowl.

‘He’ll be fine.’

‘ "Fine"?’ Roz shook her head, shaking off the feeling that he’d been trying to hypnotize her. ‘What do you mean,

"fine"?’

‘Look.’ He returned his gaze to the wound in the side of the police box, which he’d jammed open with his walking-cane.

‘The architecture’s been scrambled, but the important systems are functioning. Oxygen, power and the laws of physics are still in evidence. Mostly.’

‘That’s what you always say, isn’t it? "He’ll be fine";

‘They’ll be fine"; "Don’t worry, they can look after themselves". Is that what you say to Chris about me, when I’m off in some bloody hole somewhere? "Oh, she’ll be fine..." ‘

The Doctor gave her another one of his looks.

‘All right.’ Roz forced herself to relax. ‘Do we go in?’

‘No. It might be dangerous.’

‘Dangerous? You just said –’

‘Amaranth.’

‘What?’

He held out his hand. ‘Amaranth.’

There was an embarrassed silence.

‘Ahhh,’ said Roz.

Another look.

‘Stop it! I haven’t got it, OK? It wasn’t around when I woke up here. It got lost in transit.’

‘Didn’t we all?’ The Doctor’s brow automatically went into

‘wrinkled’ mode. He grasped the walking-cane, and pulled it out from between the lips of the opening with an unpleasant popping sound. The side of the TARDIS immediately re-sealed itself.

‘Back to civilization,’ he muttered, turning and stalking back towards Woodwicke.

‘You’re sure Chris’ll be fine?’ Roz asked as she followed him.

‘Ah,’ said the interface.

Chris experienced a moment of total paranoia, during which he managed to convince himself that there were monsters hiding in the darkness. He performed what he took to be a 360-degree turn, checking for any sign of movement, but the blackness was absolute and he wouldn’t have been able to see a Chelonian if it had been standing two feet in front of him and waving (an image which stuck in his head, for some reason).

When he’d finished the turn, he was surprised to find himself still spinning, and realized that his toes were no longer touching the ground. The computer slipped out of his grasp, but he never heard it crash against the floor.

‘ *Now* what?’ he demanded.

‘A localized gravity failure,’ said the voice, nonchalantly.

‘Your interference has created minor disturbances in certain systems. First lighting, and now gravity. One moment, please.’

There was a pause, while the interface rooted around inside the bowels of the TARDIS. Chris kept spinning

‘Interesting,’ it finally announced.

‘It’d better be,’ said Chris.

‘Something else is creating disturbances. I don’t believe all of this is your doing. Ah. The artronics have cancelled themselves out. Wait. Yes. Yes, we’re safe for now. Can you hear me, Chris Cwej?’

‘I can hear you. Look, is there anything you can do to stop me spinning? I’m getting sick.’

‘No. But listen, please. There’s something wrong with the basal structure of the ship, an unknown element has entered the core systems and... excuse me. This current syntax has difficulty describing the concepts involved. Changed them.’

‘Changed the core systems?’ Chris didn’t even know what the core systems were, but he guessed they were a damn sight more important than little things like gravity. ‘Changed them how, exactly?’

‘The systems no longer make sense. They’ve been "de–

rationalized", if you’ll excuse my atrocious misuse of the English language. The TARDIS was keeping the problem under control, at least until the Eighth Door section was removed. Now the structure has become unbalanced, large sections of the interior are falling apart. Oh.’

‘What?’ In the experience of Ex-Adjudicator Cwej, there was no word in the English language more sinister than ‘oh’.

‘We seem to have lost life-support.’

Life-support. It was one of those things Chris always took for granted when he was on the TARDIS, that there’d be enough air to keep everyone alive. He tried breathing in. It suddenly seemed difficult and painful. ‘The problem is localized, however,’ said the interface, when Chris was three-eighths of a second away from sheer panic. ‘I would therefore suggest an immediate evacuation of this section.’

Right, thought Chris. Moving in zero gravity wouldn’t be a problem; he just had to push against the wall and float away.

But he was still spinning, and had no idea which way he was facing. He tried stretching out an arm. His spin seemed to slow, but he felt no solid surface under his fingers.

'The walls have gone!' he squawked.

'Fortunately not,' said the interface. 'The walls are still existent, but surface friction is partially non-functional. If it helps, you're currently in contact with the ceiling.'

'Uh. Right.' Chris put his hands out in front of him, until he was sure that both palms had to be flat against the ceiling.

Then he pushed, with a forward-and-upward motion. Gently, he started to float off down the corridor.

'Good luck,' said the interface, not sounding like it particularly cared what happened to him.

And then, all of a sudden, there was light. Light, and air –

– and gravity.

'Ow,' said Chris as he hit the floor. He found himself lying at a T-shaped junction, surrounded by the familiar roundelled walls and ion-blistered atmosphere of the TARDIS. The corridor behind him was dark, absurdly dark. One metre away, the ship was lit with the usual creamy glow; one metre beyond that, there was just a wall of blackness, cutting off the corridor. Weird. Chris pulled himself to his feet, considering his best course of action.

It didn't take long.

'Find the Doctor,' he decided, and set off down another passage, in the hope that he'd be able to reach the console room.

Recalling the incident later, Christopher Cwej was unable to remember exactly what the things that lurked in the passageway had looked like. He vaguely remembered the sense of shock as he practically walked into the nearest of them, and occasionally recalled small details; half-finished clockwork limbs, shapeless mechanical heads, metallic fingers scratching and grinding in the corners. But he found it impossible to build a coherent picture of the creatures, as if he'd only really seen them out of the corner of his eye.

The next lucid memory he had was of running, running along the one

corridor from the T-junction that wasn't blocked off by darkness or populated by monsters of any description.

*Aliens*, he was thinking. *Aliens in the TARDIS!*

'Tell me about your childhood,' smiled the machine, and Duquesne could have sworn that its voice was the voice of a woman. She regarded the creature suspiciously, noting the fracture lines that her blow to its cheek had created.

'I have nothing to say,' she told it. 'I was a sensitive child, and a sickly one. There is little else of importance.'

The machine nodded. "'Sensitive", yes. But sensitive to what, exactly? Psycho-sensitive? Time-sensitive? Surely not.'

Duquesne sighed. 'I have never yet been able to answer the question. My spine burns when a *caillou* is near, or when I come close to the things a *caillou* leaves behind. Whenever any force or agency threatens the natural order of this world, I feel it, with a kind of sense I have never been given a word for.'

'Hence your current employment. You must be the world's most psychic civil servant.'

Duquesne was about to tell the thing that she didn't discuss government policy with strangers, let alone hallucinatory automata, when she noticed the alien word.

'Psychic?' she queried.

'Not a word you'd be familiar with, and hopefully one that you'll never learn. We can discuss this later. But tell me, how long have you had this... condition?'

Duquesne shrugged. 'When I was nineteen, I visited England. My family was quite determined that I should see the world.' That was a lie, of course. When she was nineteen, Duquesne's family had been driven out of France by the Revolution, and she was fairly sure that the machine knew it.

'I saw the church at Hodcombe, designed by a man named Inigo Jones. A great Englishman, according to my tutors, though it was a small church, and not the architect's greatest work. But that was when it came to me, for the first time. The burning. It caused me to faint, and no surgeon could ever find reason for it, putting the incident

down to female hysteria.'

'The church at Hodcombe?' The machine raised its clockwork eyebrows, causing small parts of its (her?) face to flake away. 'I understand it's supposed to be haunted.'

'As I later learned. That was when I began to understand my... condition. As you call it.'

'In an earlier time, they'd say you had "the Sight".'

'I do not understand the term,' Duquesne lied.

'The talent of a witch. The Vikings spoke of the *blood-of-the-wolf*, the curse handed down through the generations, which gives those it afflicts an understanding of the part they play in destiny's chess-game. In Europe they say there's a gift of nature that's only bestowed on the seventh son of a seventh son. But you don't seem to fit into either category, do you?'

Duquesne shrugged again, and there was a prickling sensation as her shoulders tugged at her backbone. 'But this is the eighteenth century, *bête noir*. Very nearly the nineteenth.

We live in an age of reason, and I do not believe in such enchantments.'

' *Non?* '

' *Non.* '

The automaton considered this for a moment.

'Perhaps you'd better wake up,' she said.

'I concur,' said Duquesne, and opened her eyes.

The warped wooden smell of the bed was unpleasant, by usual standards, but after the cargo hold it was like a panacea.

She was back in her cabin, and her body-clock hadn't lost more than half an hour. No doubt the crew had found her below deck and dragged her back up here, thinking 'female hysteria' had claimed her. The captain would doubtless have complained about the bad fortune that woman passengers could bring.

This was not a pleasant ship, Duquesne reflected, nor a fast one; but it

had been the first vessel leaving from Europe that went everywhere she needed to go. Africa, where she'd spent a few days at the Vatican's Crow Gallery and the cargo had been loaded, then on to New York. It didn't ordinarily serve as a passenger ship, but she was an envoy of the French authorities, and the captain – a dog-faced man called Longfoot, who began every sentence by reminding the world that his family had been on the ocean for eight generations –

obviously felt that it paid to be in Napoleon's good books.

Besides, there were worse ways to travel. As cargo, for one.

Almost in response to her thoughts, there was a low rumble from beneath her feet. Marielle Duquesne pulled herself out of the bed and prepared to venture into New York State.

Twenty years ago, the Europeans who'd visited the town had treated the King George pub as if it had been the centre of civilization. One revolution later, after the tide of dust and gunpowder and rhetoric that had purged the eastern states of everything with English blood in its veins, the George was a burned-out corpse of a building, a dirty monument to the glory of Independence. Most of the townsfolk avoided it, as if it were some kind of shrine. Which was why the Renewal Society, with their customary contempt for superstition, had taken to using it as their meeting-house.

The rain beat at the broken timbers of the roof, slid down onto the muddied floor. Erskine Morris watched spontaneous and mystical shapes form in the puddles in front of him. They reminded him that he needed a drink. *Everything* reminded him that he needed a drink.

'Nothing to worry about,' said Monroe. His voice was gruff and laced with phlegm, giving Erskine the impression that, over the years, whole sentences must have got themselves lodged in the sticky web of mucus at the back of his throat.

'Mr Catcher knows what he's doing. Menace of Cacophony and all that. Only thing that makes sense.'

Erskine didn't reply. An hour ago – less – he would have got up and screamed at the ridiculous little man: *what do you mean, makes sense? For the Great Non-Existent Entity's Sake, none of it makes sense*.

But now –

'Responsibility to history,' Monroe continued. 'Obvious, really. Don't

know why it never struck me before. Three cheers for Mr Catcher, mmm?'

– but now, the words wouldn't come. As if, after everything he'd seen in the labyrinth, any rational argument he could come up with would just sound hollow.

He let himself glance around the ruins The Renewal Society had broken up for the night, leaving the building as an empty shell once more, littered with broken bottles and the corpses of various tobacco products. There were just four men in the place now, Erskine and those of the 'inner circle' who'd accompanied him from Catcher's own little pocket of Hell.

'Funny thing,' Monroe mused. 'You could say the Catholics had the right idea all along. Witch-burnings and all that, hmmm?'

Erskine met Monroe's gaze. He couldn't shake the feeling that the man looked *wrong* somehow, changed in a way he couldn't quite put his finger on.

Then he looked down, and examined his own body. For some reason, he wasn't at all surprised to find that it looked exactly the same.

'Yeah, but what *is* an amaranth? What's it supposed to do?'

Another damp hike had taken them to the top of Paris Street, where the thoroughfare met Eastern Walk and the roadsides were littered with medicine-booths. A few of the

'attractions' were still open, small crowds gathering around them, made up of those townspeople who were determined to spend Christmas Eve as far away from their families as possible. Nobody was taking much notice of Roz or the Doctor. There was no reason why they should, Roz remembered. The world doesn't know I tried to kill Samuel Lincoln. It just feels that way.

'Do you know any of these people?' the Doctor asked.

Roz shrugged. 'Some. A couple are customers of mine.'

A look of absolute horror briefly crossed his face, but he hid it well. 'Customers?'

'I'm in the fortune-telling business.'

He seemed to relax. ‘Ah. There’s no future in it, you know.’ A half-smile played across his face. ‘Hackney Empire, 1956.’

‘What about the amaranth?’ Roz insisted.

‘Time Lord technology. The first amaranth was designed by the maintenance engineers who tended to the Eye of Harmony.’

‘Remind me.’

‘The Eye of Harmony. The power source around which all of Time-Lord civilization revolves.’ The Doctor sounded almost proud when he said that, throwing his arms wide and rolling his R’s. Or maybe he’s just taking the piss, Roz thought.

‘It’s our pet black hole,’ he continued. ‘No TARDIS could ever have got off the ground without it. But the thing about black holes is that they do tend to have unfortunate effects on the continuum around them. All sorts of things start happening when you mess about with that kind of energy. Ancient legend holds that when the Eye was first used, Rassilon himself was very nearly killed by a free-falling rhinoceros.’

‘You’re lying.’

‘Yes. But you get the idea. The continuum becomes warped, frayed, ambiguous. The amaranth is designed to stop unpleasant things happening. It looks for parts of the universe that have become unstable in some way or other, and rebuilds them according to more... *rational* patterns.’

‘But there aren’t any black holes around here. Presumably.’

‘Oh, I don’t know. I’m sure I must have one somewhere.’

He began fumbling in his pockets, but thankfully gave up the search before he managed to produce anything disturbing.

‘But I take your point. However, there are other things that can have distortional effects on the continuum.’

‘Such as?’

‘Gynoids. And their friends and families.’ He stopped abruptly, and turned, pointing at the corner of a boarded-up barber’s shop with the end of his cane. Roz squinted in that direction, just in time to see something vanish around the corner.

‘Was that...?’ she began.

The Doctor turned, pointed again, and again, and again.

Each time she looked, Roz glimpsed something out of the corner of her eye. Each time, it disappeared before she could focus on it. None of the townspeople who passed them by seemed to notice anything strange, except, of course, for a peculiar man with a walking-cane who kept pointing at things.

‘We’re surrounded,’ Roz murmured. ‘There’s got to be dozens of them.’

‘No, just one. But it’s around every corner.’

‘That doesn’t make sense.’

‘Very true.’ Casually, he slung the cane over his shoulder, and carried on walking in whatever direction he happened to be facing.

The Watchmakers spoke to him from deep within the labyrinth, and he tried communicating with them in their secret language of noughts and ones, but they wouldn’t listen.

They were criticizing him. Scorning him, for his lack of control.

Matheson Catcher was thankful that the others had left him, Reason’s flock escorting Erskine Morris home after the glory of his initiation. He wouldn’t have wanted them to see this.

One of the walls in the cellar was bubbling and cracking, as if the architecture had become bored and decided to try a host of new patterns. Chaos, blossoming out of purity. Cacophony taking advantage of his lack of vigilance.

He reached into the crystal column at the centre of the hexagonal dais, and felt the ecstasy-smooth surface of the sphere under his fingers. He drew the globe out and into his hands, began turning it, filling it up with the cold will of Reason. The wall crackled and twisted, the power of the Watchmakers’ ‘gift’ forcing it back into shape.

The Watchmakers nodded, satisfied. THIS CLOSE TO

THE DAY OF REASON, they reminded him, WHEN THE

WORLD IS READY TO BE FINALLY SNATCHED FROM

THE JAWS OF CACOPHONY... finally and decisively?

YES, FINALLY AND DECISIVELY SNATCHED FROM

THE JAWS OF CACOPHONY... WE MUST ALL BE

VIGILANT.

Yes. And Catcher was prepared for that great day, as he had been ever since his childhood, when the Watchmakers had first reached out to him. Back then, he'd only caught glimpses, his young mind unprepared for their full geometric majesty; a reflection in the face of a clock, perhaps, or an alien word spelt out in sunbeams across the face of a mirror... but they'd been there, the architects of Reason, walking alongside him.

His parents had thought the Watchmakers were the echoes of some curious fever-dream. Fever-dream. Catcher felt the sphere in his hands, the Watchmakers' greatest 'gift' to the rational world. He let himself gaze upon the splendour of the place that had once been a mere cellar, its archways and passages remade by the divine NO, THAT ISN'T A RATIONAL WORD by the cleansing influence of the 'gift', just as the world would be remade.

Fever-dream. The thought was almost enough to make Matheson Catcher smile.

'Almost', however, was a very big word.

The TARDIS was changing; but 'changing' was such a little word, kind of drab and flat-sounding, and Chris was sure he'd be able to understand what was happening a lot better if he'd had a word to describe it. He'd look at a section of wall, and he'd see things in its design that hadn't been there a few seconds earlier. The wall wouldn't change its shape or its size or its colour, it would just change, showing him new aspects of itself that he'd never noticed before.

Not that he had much time for looking at walls. Not with a bunch of shapelesshideousalienmonstersAAAARGH at his back.

The corridor was a long one, junctions and doorways leading off it at all angles. Some of the doorways were in darkness, a weird kind of darkness that reminded Chris of his kidhood, watching simcord holo-vid episodes of *EarthDoom XV* from behind the sofa. Some of the passages he passed didn't seem to fit in with the architecture of the TARDIS at all, like he was looking into another ship, a mirror-image of

the one he was used to.

*What you really need is a Frisbee*, he told himself, but couldn't for the life of him work out why he'd thought it.

He made it to the end of the corridor, turned a corner, skidded, lost his balance, and tripped against a door.

Pretending he'd done it deliberately – he was determined to hold on to his dignity, even if the only ones watching him were shapeless alien monsters – he grasped the door-frame and used it to swing himself around, looking back along the corridor at the ticking-tocking things that were breathing down his neck.

'Ag,' he said, then lost his grip on the frame and fell against the door. It opened at his touch, sending him sprawling into the hallway on the other side.

*I'm telling you, you need a frisbee. Remember when you were a kid? You had this really neat frisbee...*

As the door was swinging shut, he caught a glimpse of one of the monsters in close-up. It had been hiding just around the corner, not two metres away, waiting for him 'Lurking'. That was the only word for it, 'lurking'. The thing turned to watch him, its head clicking and buzzing on top of a copper-coloured neck. The last thing Chris Cwej saw before the door closed was the thing's face; and the thing's face told him that it was fifteen minutes to ten.

It had taken Marielle Duquesne less than ten minutes to find the device. If 'find' was the word; in truth, the device had hooked her by the spine and dragged her to its door.

It had begun the second she'd stepped off the ship, the sensation that told her a *caillou* had left his spoor behind, more powerful than she'd ever known it before. She'd moved like a sleepwalker, and the call had led her to a stretch of woodland on the fringes of civilization, where bugs chattered to each other in the nettles and everything stank of damp earth. Even before she'd reached the glade, she'd known that the device would be there, and now she was standing no more than three yards from its cool blue surface, shivering in the rain.

It was just a box. Yes, it was the most terrible and glorious thing she had ever seen... but it was still just a box, a simple construction of wooden beams and glass panels. At this distance, she could see the shapes that had been printed onto its sides, but she had to stare at the

markings for at least a minute before she realized that they were nothing more than ordinary letters. Were they moving? Turning themselves into anagrams?

No. Something was altering her perception – perhaps it was the box itself – so that the words became irrational and meaningless. They were in English, though, she was sure of that much. A 'P', an 'L'... was that an 'O' between them? An

'X'?

Suddenly, Duquesne realized that she was stepping closer to the device, her arms stretched out in front of her. The letters blurred again, and it was only then, in that moment of true panic, that she noticed how the very angles of the box were wrong, as if geometry itself had ceased to function.

Her fingers touched the front of the box. She felt nothing, but there was an impression of something vast and liquid hidden beneath the surface. She could only watch as the wooden veneer started to melt and flow, lapping across her fingers. Her hands began sinking into the shape. Absently, she remembered the stories she'd heard her superiors in the Directory tell, about those who had been captured by the *caillou*. They'd been taken to other worlds, said the tales, carried away in heavenly carriages, used as subjects in horrible and incomprehensible experiments...

And there was no longer a box. There were just corners and spaces, rectangles that danced and holes that seemed to penetrate time itself. Marielle Duquesne let herself be dragged into the heart of the madness.

They were making their way along Paris Street now, back towards the Lincoln house. Roz found herself grinning inanely at the few people she passed, in a kind of gunshot-I-don't-know-nothing-about-no-gunshot way. The Doctor was still talking.

'The amaranth also has an emergency function,' he said. 'If it finds itself in a place that it can't make any sense of at all, it's programmed to whisk its user off to a more stable part of the continuum. Which is how you arrived here from... that other place.'

'Which was?'

'Yes, it was.'

Roz gritted her teeth. ‘I mean, where was it?’

‘Oh, I’m sorry. I thought you were being zen.’

‘Answer the damn question.’

‘I can’t. I don’t know the answer.’

‘Fine. Then tell me why the amaranth brought me here.

Why not the TARDIS? Or anywhere, except this place.’

‘A good question. I’d guess that somebody here has been creating anomalies, which could well be why the gynoids are manifesting themselves. It might also explain why parts of the rational universe seem to be cracking open, hence your sudden departure from Arizona. The amaranth must have homed in the disruption. When it decided to leave you, it was probably just locating the heart of the disturbance. Find it now, and you find who’s been causing all the trouble. And vice versa.’

He paused for a moment. ‘And we have to find the guilty party quickly,’ he added. ‘We can’t let them keep the amaranth.’

‘Of course we can’t. It’s ours.’

‘That aside. They know how to destabilize space–time. The amaranth can reconstruct destabilized space–time. Ergo, with the amaranth they can remodel the universe at will. It should take them a while to work out how to use it properly, and they’ll only be able to change a small part of the continuum at a time, but even so...

‘Don’t do that.’

‘Don’t do what?’

‘Trail off in mid-sentence. It’s not sinister, it’s just irritating.’ Roz was still glancing at every corner they passed, looking for the omnipresent gynoid, though by now she couldn’t tell when she was seeing something and when she was just imagining things. ‘One more question. Goddess, I hate it when I have to say that.’

‘Yes?’

‘What’s happened to the TARDIS?’

‘It’s been de-rationalized. Now, there’s one Doctor Johnson left out of

his dictionary.'

'Why?'

'Oh, well, you know, Doctor Johnson was a lot more parochial than most people seem to think...'

'Why-has-the-TARDIS-been-de-rationalized?' Roz hissed, through gritted teeth. This was the kind of conversation she'd often heard Bernice have with the Doctor, and Roz didn't want to be the one that filled her shoes. Facetiousness didn't come easily to her.

'Ah.' The Doctor nodded seriously. 'Are you sure you wouldn't rather ask me about Doctor Johnson? I'd probably find it much easier to answer the questions.'

The witch-woman?

The witch-woman, she'd know. If the Devil himself had come to Woodwicke, the witches and the fortune-tellers had to be part of it. Hah, but he didn't believe in the Devil, did he?

Why would anyone need to believe in devils when there were Englishmen in the world?

Follow the witch-woman, follow her and the white magician she walked with, find out how to make the damned town leave him alone and let him sneak back into the cracks.

Find out what bastard ghost was whispering at him, pulling him back into Woodwicke every time he tried to walk away from it.

No one saw Daniel Tremayne when he crept along Paris Street. No one saw Daniel Tremayne when he crept anywhere.

He was at one with the room. He was in every corner, stretched along every surface. Its angles were his angles, its purity was his purity. And he was content. Just for that one moment.

Then one of the corners blistered again, ripples shaking their way across the wall. Liquid Cacophony crawling across his marble skin. He shivered, the cellar shivered, everything was falling apart –

*He was in the garden, surrounded by the seeds of chaos, shrubs and weeds enveloping his family's estate. How old?*

*Six? Seven? Tearing at the green, pulling the flowers and the grasses out of the earth, sick sappy stickyness against his clean white skin. Jungle-gods screeched and chattered in the woods and the wildlands beyond the garden. Creatures of Cacophony. He kept tearing, and somewhere in the high grass, one of the Watchmakers caught his eye. Nodded approvingly, the big hand clicking round to twelve.*

The wall burst open, vomiting madness into the cellar. He tried not to cry out.

*And inside the house, it was even worse. Wall-hangings that made no sense, painted faces leering at him from behind glassy prisons. Porcelain likenesses of dead and irrational gods, sculpted by foreign primitives. He was running into the house, dead grass-stems still clinging to his knees, but the house was just like the jungle, a wilderness of dirt and wood.*

*Break everything. Tear everything. Leave the clocks and the mirrors – you can see the faces of the Watchmakers in those –*

*get rid of the rest. There were looks of horror on the faces of his family. Stop it, please, stop it. CLEAN IT UP someone was screeching, CLEAN IT ALL UP Pinning him to the ground –*

– but he would not WOULD NOT let the chaos take him, and he was already forcing his will into the corner of the cellar, catching the madness in one hand, holding the spinning sphere in the other, pushing the nightmares back into the darkness.

The walls were made solid again. Matheson Catcher opened his eyes, and all was right with the world.

Chris moved in the general direction of the console room, slowly making his way through whichever corridors looked safest. The aliens were everywhere now, but not once did he get a good look at one; either they lurked in the shadows, stayed on the edges of his vision, or just crouched behind (or inside) parts of the architecture.

He could imagine them pretty well, though. He pictured them lounging around in his quarters, scratching alien graffiti into the walls. Occasionally, a beam of light would glint off a half-seen face or a sinister talon – his imagination should have won awards for lighting effects – maybe falling across a set of razor-like clockwork jaws...

Chris decided that this kind of thinking probably wasn't getting him very far. Then again, neither was his attempt to reach the console room.

'Right,' he hissed, crouching in the corner of a junction that seemed mercifully free of alien interference. 'Let's figure this out. Disturbances. Interface said disturbances. What can do strange stuff to the insides of a TARDIS?'

He looked around, but no one was there to give him any hints. 'Uh. Gravity? The Doctor said extreme gravitational conditions could make bits of the TARDIS break up. Or something. Hang on.'

He tried jumping up and down, but nothing seemed unusual. 'OK, not that. What else? Er, maybe we've skipped a time-track.'

He looked around again. Well, time seemed normal. Could you see a skipped time-track? 'Maybe not. Come on, come on, think OK. Suppose there was some kind of dimensional glitch.

Suppose the TARDIS doors had opened in mid-flight or something, and the resulting dimensional imbalance –'

He was just getting to grips with this remarkable new theory when something walked along an adjoining corridor and turned down a side-passage. Chris hopped to his feet and flattened himself against a wall, waiting for the thing to pass.

The shape was human. A woman, in her late twenties or early thirties, with a shapeless dress that trailed down to the floor. Dark hair, matted by rainwater and sticking to her shoulders. She was looking around

with a dazed expression on her face, and Chris got the feeling that she didn't know whether to be shocked or impressed.

Then she vanished along the passage. Chris relaxed.

'This is getting too much,' he said, and went in pursuit.

The Doctor was sitting on the dust-spattered floor at the far end of the nave, his back to the lectern. Breathing heavily, Roz slumped down onto one of the pews. The church was empty, but the atmosphere still managed to seem tense, somehow.

Perhaps the building's just excited, she thought. Perhaps it's looking forward to midnight mass.

The Doctor had insisted that the gynoid had been right behind them, though Roz's senses still hadn't managed to get a grip on it. 'They have ways of not being seen,' he'd muttered, and an image had popped into Roz's head of a gynoid wearing a false nose and moustache, but before she'd been able to open her mouth and share it, the Doctor had been hopping up the stone steps towards the church door.

Above them, a brass bell chimed ten times. The original bell, Roz had been informed, had been melted down for the artillery shells two decades ago. The replacement was cheap and tinny.

'Our subliminal friend outside seems to want to keep an eye on us,' mused the Doctor. By the time he'd finished the sentence, he'd already started juggling with an odd assortment of objects that had spontaneously emerged from his pockets, pebbles and credit-chips and oil cans and Sidelian memory-bubbles. It looked like a nervous habit, a way of keeping his mind off the absence of his umbrella. 'Something very intelligent and very ambitious is at work here. Sadly, we have no idea who he, she, or it is, or what he, she, or it wants.'

'Uh-huh. And I don't suppose we could just ask them?'

The Doctor stopped juggling and frowned at her, as if she'd just won the Eurovision Stupid Question Contest. 'Why else would we come to a church?' he asked, innocently. 'Observe.'

He stood, looking around the church, and Roz wondered where the juggled objects had vanished to all of a sudden. He was taking in the architecture, apparently looking for some special feature, but not giving any indication of what it might be. Then, abruptly, he threw his

arms wide, cane outstretched, and whirled around to face the grubby stained-glass window that was set into the wall above the lectern.

‘ *What do you want?* ’ he shouted.

His voice echoed around the church, and the words blurred into one deep, steady throb; but there was no answer. No shit, thought Roz. What had he been expecting?

‘Here,’ he shouted. ‘Here in the church. Whoever you are, I know you can hear me. These walls were built for calling.

What do you want?’

Roz looked around, checking that there wasn’t anything crawling from the shadows. There wasn’t. Aside from the echo, still bouncing from corner to corner, the church was perfectly quiet, perfectly still. The Doctor lowered his arms and stood, waiting, not taking his eyes off the window.

The echo was still throbbing through the room, which struck Roz as unusual. Shouldn’t it have faded? Maybe that was what the Doctor had been looking for; maybe he’d been checking out the acoustics. ‘These walls were built for calling,’ he’d said... and she could still hear his last word,

‘want’, repeated over and over, almost like a heartbeat. Want.

Want. Want. Want.

And now the beat was slowing down.

Now, that just wasn’t natural. The pitch of the echo stayed the same, but the pulse was becoming more relaxed. Hypnotic, even.

‘Doctor –’ Roz began.

‘I can hear you,’ he said.

She immediately realized that he wasn’t talking to her.

‘ *Want,*’ said a voice.

Roz spun on her heel. The voice had come from one of the corners. Which one?

‘ *Want,*’ it said again.

It wasn't the Doctor's voice. It had crawled out of the Doctor's voice, the way maggots crawl out of cheese, but it had a character all its own. The Doctor had turned to look as well, but judging by his expression, he couldn't see anything either.

' *Want,*' insisted the voice, and the stained-glass window exploded.

## 4

### Moment of Catastrophe

Erskine Morris stood at the end of Eastern Walk, not sure whether he was staring up at the night sky, staring up towards Heaven, or just staring up in general. Blunt, mud-coloured droplets plopped onto his upturned face.

'Hellfire and buggery,' he told the sky. 'Clockwork and anarchy.'

From somewhere nearby, there was the sound of breaking glass. Behind him, Walter Monroe cleared his throat.

'We'll be seeing you at the next meeting, of course?' the pudgy little man said. Monroe's face was deadly serious.

Coldly rational. Brow furrowed. As if nothing out of the ordinary had ever happened to him.

'Of course,' Erskine heard himself say.

Monroe nodded, his jowls quivering comically. 'Good, good. I'm sure you'll have a lot to offer the world. You know.

In the struggle.'

'Struggle,' Erskine repeated. 'By Christ, yes. The struggle.'

'Good to have you with us,' Monroe said.

Erskine opened his mouth to say something. He didn't know what. He just decided to say the first thing that came into his head

He was interrupted by a shout from up the street.

'The *church*!' It was one of the other Renewalists, one of Catcher's arse-kissers, running from the corner where Eastern Walk met Paris Street. 'Something's happening at the church!'

‘The church?’ Monroe frowned, the corners of his mouth disappearing behind large sacks of cheek-flesh. ‘Why should we care about...?’

‘Cacophony! At the *church*!’

Monroe turned to face Erskine, and said something which –

recalling the incident later – Erskine could never quite remember. But the next thing he knew, he was running towards Paris Street with the rest of them.

The screen was another of the Watchmakers’ great achievements. It was set into one of the walls at eye-level, a grey slab two feet across, and Catcher had found that – if he commanded the sphere in a correct and reasonable fashion –

the screen would become illuminated, displaying images of objects in the near vicinity. Evidently a device of great scientific merit, Catcher had decided, probably something to do with mirrors.

This time, the screen had activated itself. Catcher regarded the new image. A woodland; he instinctively scratched his arm, reminded of the terrible crawling things of the wilderness. The view was vaguely familiar, and he deduced that it was the woodland on the outskirts of Woodwicke, but –

– but there was something there. Catcher squinted, trying to make out its shape. A box. A blue box? It was hard to tell; the box quivered and shifted, re-arranging itself illogically, seemingly at whim. Catcher suddenly realized that he’d stopped breathing.

‘Engine of Cacophony,’ he croaked.

He felt his hands touch the dais in front of him, felt the vibration as the sphere began to rotate inside the crystal column. He tried to ignore the fact that his knuckles were sinking into the surface of the hexagon.

‘Who brought it here?’ he demanded. ‘Who is responsible?’

There was a pause, as if the room itself were thinking Then the picture on the screen changed. There was the church, the damnable DAMNABLE IS NOT A RATIONAL WORD

deplorable church on Paris Street. There were two figures there, staring up at the stained-glass window.

‘I know you,’ hissed Catcher. ‘I know who you are.’

From somewhere deep within the labyrinth, there was an ugly grating sound, machine parts stirring in ancient metal sockets. The Watchmakers were nodding in agreement.

Roz yelped, and instinctively raised her hands to shield her face from the rain of shards. The yelp was surprisingly satisfying, so she did it again. Good. That was much better.

Slowly, she opened her eyes and lowered her arms.

The first thing she saw was the Doctor, still standing in front of the lectern, his back turned to her. The second thing she saw was absolutely everything.

The *everything* hovered above the lectern, and its heart was where the window had been. Whether the shape had absorbed the glass or the glass had absorbed the shape, she wasn’t entirely sure, but the splinters were floating inside its body, forming glittering pathways that twisted and rearranged themselves as she watched. There was a whole new world trapped inside every little piece of glass, and whenever the pieces locked together to form a ‘circuit’, an entire alien universe was born inside its body, the shape becoming something totally new and unfamiliar, sculpted by different laws of physics. Roz felt she was just looking at a fragment of the thing, if ‘thing’ was a big enough word, one face of something that had a million faces. And was that all the gynoids really were? Walking windows, that you could look through to catch glimpses of something bigger and older and stranger?

The Doctor hardly even reacted. He stood, still and calm, as if trying to out-stare it. There was a moment’s pause.

A frown flickered across his face. His ears twitched.

‘Run,’ he finally declared.

Roz backed away slightly, but that was all.

‘ *Run*,’ he repeated.

‘I thought you wanted to talk to it.’

‘It. Not *them*. Listen.’

Then she heard the footsteps. Two pairs, maybe three, thick-soled shoes on stone, and a murmuring from the other side of the church doors. People – ordinary human-type people

– attracted by the sound of breaking glass.

Roz turned just as the door opened, and came face-to-face with two of the local men. Funny how they suddenly looked the size of enraged gorillas. Not *very* funny, though. Their faces were dark at first, obviously expecting to see someone vandalizing the church, but that soon changed.

They looked at the creature, then at the Doctor, then at Roz, desperately searching for something to say.

'Let me just check,' said Roz. 'Do you burn people for being witches around here?'

And she could have sworn that the glass gynoid laughed, polished flesh rippling with a sound like applause. The men were starting to edge closer, fists clenched. Not an aggressive gesture, Roz guessed, but a defensive one; they were trying to imagine that they were holding clubs. A primal impulse. And they called *me* a savage? There was already a crowd building up behind them, shouts and rumours exchanged across the nearby streets. The gynoid shuffled. The Doctor sighed.

'I call Thee, Baalzebub,' he said, making sinister gestures with his hands. 'Lord of the Pit, I bid Thee appear, and lay waste to the domain of Thine enemies!'

On the final word, he whirled around and pointed dramatically at the wall directly above the door. Startled, the men who were already inside the church turned to follow the gesture, still wielding their imaginary clubs, and the others in the doorway surged backwards, not wanting the spawn of Satan to drop down onto their heads. Naturally, no foul apparition materialized. The space above the door remained resolutely empty.

Roz suddenly realized that the Doctor was looking at her.

'Ahem,' he said.

'Right,' she said. 'Got it.' And she began to run, pushing her way through the confused townsfolk and away down the steps of the church. She knew a distraction when she saw one.

Marielle Duquesne wasn't even scared. There were sensations buzzing around in her head that she knew she should be interpreting as fear and panic, but her body had forgotten how to make the chemicals that would normally send her into a state of hysteria. Her fears of being abducted by the *caillou* –

to be used as an exhibit in some other-worldly carnival peepshow, perhaps? – no longer seemed to make much sense.

So she just walked, slowly and calmly, along the impossibly long corridors she'd found inside the 'magic box', letting the walls hum their alien melodies to her. Her spine should have been on fire. Instead, there was just a numbness, as if her extra sense (she absolutely refused to call it 'the Sight') was trying to scream, but some other force was keeping it gagged, keeping it quiet.

She stopped, stared at the walls. The roundels stared back.

'Is it you?' she asked the corridor. 'Is it *your* doing?'

And for one brief and improbable moment, she was sure she saw one of the roundels wink at her.

'Hey,' called a voice. 'Hey, hello there?'

Duquesne turned, startled. There was a shape approaching from down the corridor, a large, lanky shape that moved like a trained athlete. 'Can you see me?' the shape asked. 'I mean, you're not a ghost or anything, right?'

It was a man. A tall man, well over six feet in height, dressed in a silky silver-tinged material that reminded Duquesne of the worst fashion excesses of Paris. Paris before the Revolution, naturally. His narrow face was topped by a crop of short blond hair, and from this distance his eyes seemed as wide as the roundels. His accent suggested that he was American, though there was a peculiar alien lilt to it that Duquesne couldn't place.

She shook her head, and felt her back press itself against the wall. 'S'OK,' the man said. 'You don't have to be afraid of me. Er. Hang on. Am I supposed to be afraid of you?'

The question took Duquesne by surprise. 'I'm sorry?'

'I mean, you're not the one who's causing the TARDIS to...

oh, are you French?'

Ahh, he was a fast one. 'But I do speak English, sir.'

'Don't worry about it. In here, you speak everything.' His eyes danced across her face for a moment, then settled on her left cheek. Staring at the burn, Duquesne realized. She caught his eye, and he looked away, embarrassed.

She decided to take the advantage. 'Pardon me, Mr...?'

'What? Oh. Cwej. Er. Christopher.'

'Christopher.' Duquesne smiled weakly, urging herself into

'flirt' mode. Acting the *agent provocateur*. 'Am I to take it that this... place... is your property?'

The man shrugged. 'Well, I live here, if that's any help.

Listen, do you know how you got in? Did you come through the door? Has someone left it open?'

'Door? No, Mr Cwej. Christopher. There was no door. The box simply opened itself up to me.' She batted her eyelids. He was a *caillou*, no doubt about it. Then why couldn't she feel anything? 'I am but a simple-minded Frenchwoman, here to see the wonders of the New World. If I have stumbled upon your property, I apologize.'

Duquesne realized she was over-acting, but there was something in this Cwej's face – something young and stupid –

which suggested that he might fall for it. He didn't answer for a while, and Duquesne wondered what he might be thinking Then she followed his gaze up the corridor.

At first sight, it seemed that the corridor was shrinking, with the dark wall at the far end advancing towards them. That would have been alarming enough in itself; but then Duquesne realized that it wasn't a wall, at least not a solid one. It was a wave of darkness, rolling up the passage, carrying with it a tumult of chattering clockwork mouths and snapping mechanical joints.

She felt Christopher Cwej's hand close around her wrist, saw him turn and start to run, trying to pull her along behind him. Halfway along the corridor, the wave broke. Darkness washed over them, droplets

bursting against their skins and exploding into childish nightmares.

‘This had better be good,’ said Mr Wolcott, settling in his chair.

‘They’re burning down the church,’ said Mr Van DeVanter.

Mr Wolcott gawped. Evidently, that was good enough.

If there was one word that could describe the meeting hall of the local council, that word was ‘cheap’. Woodwicke was a small and unremarkable town, a fact which made the Romanesque architecture of the hall seem laughable rather than grandiose. Similarly, the four individuals gathered around the table made distinctly unimpressive VIPs.

‘What church?’ demanded Mr Wolcott. ‘ *Our* church?’

Mr Van DeVanter nodded.

‘They can’t do that! Who told them they could do that?’

Mrs Wilson made an unpleasant snorting sound. ‘ *If* we could follow the *proper* procedure? *Thank* you. I *would* like to call to order this *emergency* meeting of the *Wood* wicke town council –’

‘Just a moment. Who’s burning down the church, exactly?’

Mr Van DeVanter shrugged. ‘Jesuits?’

Mrs Wilson cleared her throat. Viciously. ‘That *is* the item *on* the agenda, gentlemen. We *have* heard that the church became in *fest* ed with, er...’

‘The minions of Baalzebub,’ cut in Mr Van DeVanter.

‘Peter McLeod told me he saw them himself. About quarter of an hour ago. Like something out of Hell, he said.’

‘Rot,’ said Mr Wolcott.

Mr Van DeVanter nodded again. ‘Never believed a word McLeod ever said. The way he tells it, though, some of the people set light to the building just to flush out this devil-thing. You know what that bunch on Hazelrow Avenue are like. Catholic upbringing. Show ‘em something they don’t understand, they’ll set light to it.’

‘ *If* we can bring this meeting to order,’ Mrs Wilson whined.

‘It *does* seem that we *may* have a *pub* lic order problem, and that we *may* have some other, er, disturbance. Now, as I’m *sure* you’re aware, there’s *no* precedent for a, er, *super* natural panic in the minutes of this council. We *there* fore have to make a *quick* decision about *what* steps are to be taken.’

There was an embarrassingly long pause.

‘Erm, excuse me?’ murmured Isaac Penley.

All eyes turned on him Everyone had forgotten that he was there.

‘I have sort of heard of this kind of thing before,’ he said, blushing visibly. ‘I don’t think it’s, um, supernatural.’

‘I could’ve told you that,’ growled Mr Wolcott.

‘Yes. Yes. But what I thought was, well... there are quite a few good, solid minds in the neighbourhood. You know.

Scientists. Rationalists ‘

‘You mean the Renewal Society?’ asked Mrs Wilson. Isaac jumped at the mention of the name.

‘Well, yes,’ he admitted. ‘I think they may have some experience with this sort of thing I’ve heard some of them sort of, erm, talking about it. The last few weeks. I thought perhaps... you know. Perhaps we could ask *them* what sort of steps we should be taking.’

And, with a sense of timing that even the greatest gods of the theatre couldn’t have matched, the grand double-doors of the hall were pushed open, accompanied by a pained and protracted grinding sound. All heads turned towards the outstandingly ordinary figure that stood in the doorway.

‘Good evening,’ said Matheson Catcher.

‘– stand away from it. Stand away from it –’

The church was ablaze, and even the rain wasn’t enough to put out the fire. Tourette wormed his way through the crowd that had gathered on Paris Street. They were like spectators at a carriage accident, he thought. Some kind of monster, the rumours said. Tourette hadn’t seen it himself, but the words

‘demon’, ‘glass’, and ‘electrical’ had all been used.

‘– is it dead? Someone said it was dying –’

From what Tourette could gather, the crowd was split into two factions. Some – notably the older witnesses – were claiming that the creature was a familiar of Satan, come to pass judgment on the sinners of Woodwicke. Others were more rational, and insisted that the beast was some form of scientific phenomenon run wild (the words ‘ball lightning’ had been muttered). Oddly enough, though, both camps seemed to have the same qualities of fear and suspicion in their voices, and when some of the more zealous traditionalists had elected to ‘sterilize’ the building with a flaming torch or two, not even the hardiest of rationalists had stopped them.

Well, what could you expect from peasants?

‘– there’s someone still in there, I’m sure I saw him –’

Then the shout went up from the front of the crowd. The monster had gone, they said, either driven back by the purifying flames or dissipated by heat-energy, depending on which faction you followed. Tourette nodded, made another mental note.

‘-– you can’t kill it! Of course you can’t kill it!’

Just as he was about to turn away, a man emerged from the archway, his peculiar cream suit blackened by soot, his face wrinkled and soured by the smoke. Tourette saw two of the larger locals grab the poor soul and drag him away from the building, a third man brutally clubbing him senseless with some kind of blunt instrument. Probably just an innocent bystander, Tourette thought, who knew nothing about the thing in the church. The man was obviously well-bred; peasants usually turned on their betters when they were confused and frightened.

Tourette decided to return to his boarding house and make his report to the Shadow Directory at once. He’d show that Duquesne bitch. Oh yes. Where was she now, eh? Where was she now things were starting to happen?

They’d taken shelter in a great wooden-panelled and dome-shaped hall, which Mr Christopher Cwej had referred to as

‘the planetarium’. The darkness was somewhere outside, Duquesne was sure of it, but everything seemed quiet enough in here. They sat in the shadow of an enormous brass mechanism, an intricate clockwork engine around which large representations of planets and

moons revolved on thick stems of copper. It was like the solar system in miniature, thought Duquesne, though there were fourteen planets instead of seven.

'... and it just materializes,' Christopher was explaining.

'Out of thin air. Pop! Any place, any time. Although we can't change history. Not one line, apparently. I mean, maybe the odd word or two. I don't know.' He shrugged. 'And that's it, basically. That's what we do. It's kind of like a job.'

He looked her in the eye.

'You don't believe me, do you?' he asked.

'Of course I believe you, Christopher.' She tried her best to inject her voice with a dose of innocence and wide-eyed excitement. 'Why would I not?'

He shrugged again. 'You people haven't even got space travel yet. If someone told me they were a time-traveller from a thousand years in the future... well, y'know.'

Duquesne forced a smile. '"There are more things in Heaven and Earth..." ' she began, hoping that the English quotation would appeal to him

Instead, he just stared. 'More things than what?'

'I'm sure it isn't important, Christopher,' sighed Duquesne.

There was a moment's silence.

'You're taking all of this really well,' he said, quietly.

Duquesne felt her spine rattle.

*He knows. He knows I'm lying about just wandering into this TARDIS device. He knows that not all of this is new to me.*

*He knows I'm here for a reason.*

*What else does he know?*

There was a muffled scratching from behind one of the wooden panels, and Duquesne was glad of the distraction.

They watched as a finger, razor-sharp and fashioned from bronze, tore its way through the wall. Soon there were other fingers, other scrapings and scratchings. It sounded like the things were taking the planetarium apart from the outside, removing the walls panel by panel.

'What are they?' asked Duquesne, but the look on Christopher's face told her that he had absolutely no idea.

Roz Forrester sheltered in the side-street, her body strategically positioned between the wall of a house (she suspected that it was the Lincoln house, but she didn't let herself dwell on that) and a six-foot stack of empty wooden crates that smelt of rotten fish. Roz wasn't sure what empty crates that smelt of rotten fish were doing there, but then this was the kind of town that left its rubbish lying in the streets until it either sank into the dust or evolved into something worthwhile. Half of the buildings in Woodwicke looked like they were descended from ambitious piles of garbage. God bless America, thought Roz. Still in its infancy, and already building an empire out of trash.

From here, she could see the spectators that had gathered outside the church, but they couldn't see her. At least, not unless they squinted through the smoke reeeeeeeal hard. She'd run from the church until she'd been sure that no one was on her tail, then doubled back and found the best vantage point.

She'd reached the side-street just as they'd dragged the Doctor out, cursing in a bizarre alien language that made great use of the letter X. A performance, Roz was sure, and she suspected that they'd only captured him because he'd wanted to be captured. But they'd been clubbing him when they'd pulled him away, pummelling at his head and shoulders until he'd stopped struggling. She was sure that hadn't been part of his plan.

Behind her, something scraped against the wall.

Damn. She'd been followed after all.

She paused for a while before she turned, pretending that she hadn't heard anything. She counted the seconds. If he (he?) was creeping up on her, it'd take him another... oh, call it four seconds... to reach her. Three. Two. In one movement, she rose and turned, fists clenched, ready to deck whoever was standing behind her.

Two sleepless brown eyes stared into hers. The face, blasted by dirty rain and pocked with stubble, looked so tired and helpless that Roz

relaxed without even thinking about it.

‘Need help,’ said the boy. ‘You know. Know what it’s like trying to get out of this town. *Hahh*.’

‘There is, of course, a perfectly rational explanation.’

Isaac Penley was beginning to relax. The incident at the church could have been a catastrophe without precedent, but as soon as Catcher had said that word – ‘rational’ – Isaac had known that something could be done about it.

‘Which is?’ inquired Mr Van DeVanter.

‘Cacophony.’

Isaac felt himself tense up again.

‘I’m sorry, Mr Catcher...?’

‘The thing that was seen at the church was neither daemonic nor a freak weather condition. It was an agent of Cacophony.’

Astonishingly, Mr Van DeVanter was nodding. ‘This Cacophony. Is it a Spanish agency, at all? Or is it Jewish?’

‘Cacophony is the force that seeks to plunge the human race into a dark age of superstition, Mr Van DeVanter,’

Catcher intoned. ‘There were two individuals seen entering the church before the "apparition" arrived. These are, I have it on good authority, diabolists in the service of Cacophony.’

‘Diabolists?’ squawked Mrs Wilson. ‘Are you suggesting, er, some form of Devil-worship?’

Catcher’s head cocked to one side, mechanically. He blinked with absolute precision and determination. ‘Ignorant terms,’ he announced.

Mrs Wilson blanched.

‘Then what do you suggest we do?’ asked Mr Wolcott.

‘Obviously, there is a risk of mass panic. Cacophony operates by spreading chaos throughout civilized society. We must be rational.’

‘Yes. Yes, that makes sense.’

‘The entire town must be taught to be rational. Especially now that... things... are about to change.’

Mr Wolcott coughed. ‘Taught in what way, exactly?’

‘The Renewal Society is an organization of sane, rational minds. It will thus be immune to the effects of the discord.

Therefore, the Society’s members should seek to spread their influence throughout the affected areas. A quite obvious, rational precaution to take.’

‘I’m not sure I understand what you’re suggesting,’

grumbled Mr Wolcott. ‘I mean, the town has its own watchmen ...’

‘They can hardly be expected to handle this kind of disturbance,’ cut in Mrs Wilson.

Catcher opened his mouth to agree – Isaac was sure he heard the man’s jaw click into place – when there was a heavy knock at the door. Other sounds could be heard from the corridor outside, murmurs and scrapings.

‘Enter,’ chirped Mrs Wilson. To Isaac’s surprise, two of the larger residents of Hazelrow Avenue entered the hall, followed by a third man with a makeshift club in his hand. Between them they carried the limp, soot-stained figure of a man, a white hat pulled over his face, a walking-cane stuffed into his belt. His suit was the kind of thing that might be fashionable in one of the less sensible nations of Europe.

‘Sir –’ one of the men began, addressing no one in particular.

‘The diabolist,’ said Catcher, quite calmly.

The word turned the room to ice. Everybody stared at the unconscious man in the cream suit.

The fire had been burning for so long that the flames had grown tired, becoming sick and listless in their old age. The Doctor frowned as the two guards (dressed in gleaming astronaut suits, which made a kind of sense) tied him to the stake, but the chambers of Hell smelt of burned toast, and the Inferno was as sticky as a bad nightclub.

‘I see you’ve gone for a hellfire-and-damnation motif,’ said the Doctor. ‘Very gauche. Personally, I prefer a more metaphysical Hell. Do you

have anything with Daleks in it?'

At the far side of the cavern, the four judges shuffled excitedly behind their desks, searching their pockets for their black hats.

'He's a witch,' said the twelfth-century warrior with the cross burned into his chest. 'Burn him. Burn him and all of his little helpers.'

'Sounds good to me,' said the fat man in the toga sitting next to him. 'Throw another violin on the fire, eh?'

'Death by particle dissemination!' croaked the Time Lady at his right hand. 'Death by particle dissemination!'

The fourth judge just coughed and arbitrarily apologized about something.

The Doctor's frown deepened by three microns. 'Frankly, I don't feel like wasting my breath arguing with any of you.

You're all very dull and predictable, and I'd hoped for a better class of final inquisition.'

'Ding-dong,' said the machine as it strode confidently into the heart of Hell. 'You called?'

'Ah,' said the Doctor. 'Now might be a good time to raise a surprised eyebrow.'

The machine was a clock, that much was clear. It had no hands, no pendulums, no markings; but a clock was a clock was a clock, and you don't spend the best part of a millennium as a Time Lord without being able to tell one at a glance. The machine's gears and wheels were balanced so precisely that one breath out of place might have caused them to collapse.

'I take it that you're the grand inquisitor of this witch-trial?' the Doctor asked.

The machine shook its head, and a great crack ran across its central wheel. 'It's not a trial, it's an Inquiry. And you're not a witch, you're an Initiate. Now, as I understand it, the point of this scenario is for the Initiate to explore his own psyche. You are your own inquisitor, isn't that the idea?'

'Not if someone else is pulling the strings. Or, rather, winding the

watch-handle. If there's some dark and terrible secret in my past that you'd like to torment me about, please get it over with.' The Doctor sniffed haughtily. 'And I'll thank you to stop messing about with my neural processes. These are the only frontal lobes I have. My temples are sacred.'

'Actually, I just wanted a quick chat about psionics.'

'Ah.'

'Never had much time for psychic phenomena before, did you? There was that business with the IRIS machine, of course, but we won't dwell on the nasty details. Now, all of a sudden, it's breakfast with Mrs Nostradamus and lunch with Uri Geller. Odd.'

The Doctor scowled. 'I've been very busy.'

'Really? If I was going to be vicious –'

' *Were* going to be vicious. Grammar.'

'If I *was* going to be vicious, I could suggest that there are some issues you just want to avoid. And then there's Roslyn Forrester.'

The Doctor felt his eyes narrowing. It was an automatic reaction. 'What about her?'

The clock smiled innocently – something that was physically unlikely, if not actually impossible – and consulted a note in its personal disorganizer. 'Oh, I was just thinking about the time it took you to rescue her from New York. She was here for over six weeks, I believe.'

'Burn him,' interjected the crusading judge, and the others all went 'shhh'.

The Doctor sighed. 'I know. Finding her was difficult. It was a while before there were sufficient anomalies in the continuum –'

The man in the toga sniggered. The Time Lady nudged him in the ribs.

' "A while"?' queried the machine 'One fully-functional time machine at your disposal, minor hiccups aside, and you still think in terms of linear time? Not very convincing.'

'What are you suggesting?'

'That you didn't want to come here at all. You knew that in 1799

you'd find the answers, or at least some of them, and you knew the answers would sting a little. Poor Roz. Left in the lurch again.' The machine cocked its head, and various gears protested loudly in its neck. 'And what about your terrible fear of the gynoids? Or, rather, of what they represent.'

'Fear?' The Doctor's voice dropped to a snarling whisper.

'What do you know of fear?' The line was pure melodrama, he knew, but it seemed to suit the surroundings.

The machine shrugged, and there was the sound of a spring snapping from deep within her (her?) workings. 'Look down.'

The Doctor looked to his feet. He'd assumed that the stake had been erected on top of the traditional pile of tinderwood, but now he saw that he was standing on a small hill made of burning worlds, each the size of a football. Lava and mucus bubbled up from cracks that swallowed oceans. The Earth died by fire, again and again. The Doctor grimaced.

'Something wrong?' asked the machine.

'The symbolism is terrible,' replied the Doctor. 'I said you should have stuck with Daleks.'

Then the fire reached the top of the pile, the stake burst into flames, and everything went orange. The colour of closed eyelids, seen from the inside.

The Doctor called this part of the ship 'the cloisters'. It was a series of covered walkways, cracked pillars supporting a roof that protected the stone pathways from a marble-coloured artificial sky. Usually, the place reminded Chris of the Initiation Quadrangle on Ponten IV, a grand and sacred temple, but now it was just a mess. The cracks in the columns had spread across the floor, making him think of an old dried-out canal. Appropriately – but inexplicably – there were even a couple of discarded shopping trolleys lying around.

The clanking things were lurking in the cracks and the corners, but then they were lurking everywhere. Chris remembered his family taking him to the *EarthDoomWorld* exhibit on Overcity Three-Point-One, where he'd been thrown out by guides in unconvincing Star Patrol uniforms because he'd refused to find the animatronic alien monsters frightening. Those monsters had been the same as the ones now loose in the TARDIS, staying in the shadows because they knew

they were scarier that way, because what they *really* were wasn't nearly as terrifying as what they *might* have been. Chris reasoned that as long as he stayed out of the corners, he was safe.

Out of one eye, he watched Marielle, sitting on a dislodged piece of masonry nearby. She claimed to be an innocent bystander who'd entered the TARDIS by accident, but she was too calm, too... professional?

Marielle looked up at him. Chris attempted a smile.

'How are you feeling?' he asked.

'Perfectly well, thank you. Christopher.' She tried to smile back, then looked away, turning her head to the left so that the burn on her cheek wasn't visible to him.

Chris decided to take a risk.

'How are you feeling really?' he asked.

Marielle was silent for a while. She didn't make eye contact.

'My spine still feels numb,' she finally announced.

'Your spine?'

Marielle nodded. 'It has been painful since I came near your machine. You said the ship can, ahh, speak with minds?'

'I don't know about that. It's got telepathic circuits.'

She nodded, though it was clear she didn't really understand. 'Then the ship may be communicating.'

'Communicating?'

'With me. With my body. Through my nerves.'

'I don't get it,' said Chris.

Then she was looking at him, deep-set eyes peering out of a painfully thin face. Chris could see rough, badly treated skin on the other side of her pale make-up.

'I have the Sight,' she said, and a quiver in her voice suggested that she didn't want to take the last word very seriously. 'And I think your

TARDIS does, too. Or something much like it.'

'Cacophony,' said Monroe.

'Cacophony,' agreed one of the other Renewalists.

Erskine Morris looked to the burning remains of the church, across the street from where they stood at the back of the mob. The archway collapsed as he watched, showering the damp stone steps with sparks.

'Look,' he said, then realized he didn't know what to say.

'Look,' he tried again. 'Surely... the thing in the church...

maybe Catcher had something to do with it... oh, *sodomy*.'

Monroe shook his head. 'Cacophony,' he spluttered, with utter conviction. The same tone of voice you'd normally use to talk about Federalists or Whigs or Republicans, or any other sane and ordinary thing. 'As Mr Catcher said. The days of the great battle for Reason are beginning, mmm?'

'You know what Peter McLeod told us?' drawled one of the other Renewalists. 'Old Catcher's met with the council.

They've put him in charge of the whole thing, McLeod reckons.'

'It's a clear matter of duty,' Monroe concluded, reaching into the inside pocket of his brass-buttoned jacket. Erskine realized that he was reaching for his hood, the scrunched-up sackcloth unfolding like a handkerchief.

'The African,' Monroe announced. 'The so-called witch-woman. She was seen running from the church. Reason dictates that she must be a diabolist. Agreed?'

There were shapes in the orange-tinted darkness.

'Ben, what are we going to do?' Polly was saying. 'We can't just leave the Doctor there.'

'Him? The Doctor?' replied Ben.

'Well, that's who came through the doors. There was no one else outside.' There was a pause. 'Ben, do you remember what he said in the tracking room? Something about... "this old body of mine is wearing a bit thin".'

‘Ah yes,’ said the Doctor. ‘One never forgets one’s first regeneration.’

He opened his eyes. A room resolved itself, somehow grandiose without being impressive. Four people behind a table, a fifth standing beside them. The hairs on the back of the Doctor’s neck told him that there were at least two others behind him, probably the ones who’d clubbed him down. He tried to turn, but couldn’t. He concluded that he was tied to a chair. The knots were biting into his hands.

‘Is he awake?’ whined a woman’s voice. One of the seated.

‘About bloody time,’ mumbled another.

‘You’re sure this is the man who’s responsible?’ A third.

‘I’m usually the man who’s responsible,’ said the Doctor.

‘Except, of course, when I’m the man who’s irresponsible.’

There was a shocked silence.

‘I’d *like* to call this *in* terview to *or* der –’ began the woman.

‘Never mind that. Is he a diabolist? Ask him if he’s a diabolist.’

‘Diabolist?’ The Doctor made sure that he sounded offended. ‘I was under the impression that this was the age of reason. Is this supposed to be a witch-trial?’

Suddenly, there was a tangible sense of embarrassment in the room. ‘Umm,’ said one of the men. ‘Umm. It might be.’

The Doctor tutted. ‘Human beings have two notable characteristics,’ he muttered, recalling a lecture he’d once attended. ‘One, they’re extremely intelligent. Two, they’re very very stupid.’

‘Are you a servant of the Devil?’ the woman trilled, formally. She spoke slowly, as if talking to a child. Or a foreigner.

‘No,’ said the Doctor, cheerily. ‘But I may be a relation.’

And as he spoke, the fifth man stepped forward, his shoes tick-tocking on the not-really-marble floor. The Doctor peered up at him suspiciously.

‘Our course of action is clear,’ the man said, and the air turned grey on contact with his voice. ‘We have a responsibility to Reason.’

The Doctor frowned.

The boy's name, as far as Roz could gather, was Daniel Tremayne. He crouched behind the stack of crates – Roz made sure that neither of them could be seen from Paris Street –

with his face cradled in his hands. He wasn't crying, he was just trying to cover his face, as if he had an instinctive desire not to be seen. Not to be noticed.

'Still in my head,' he was saying. 'Can hear it. Like it's singing. Won't let me leave.'

'Daniel?' Roz crouched down beside him 'Daniel, I want to help you. Do you understand me?'

His head snapped up, and suddenly he was staring right into her eyes. 'Don't trust you,' he said.

'Oh.'

'But you're a witch.'

Roz sighed. This was as much as she'd been able to get out of him in ten minutes. The problem with Adjudicator interview techniques was that they only worked on people whose heads functioned at thirtieth-century speeds. 'If you say so.'

Then, unexpectedly, Daniel began to laugh. A nervous, coughing laugh that somehow sounded older than the rest of him 'Don't believe in witches,' he said. 'But you're a witch.

Help me.'

'All right, let's start at the beginning. What is it that won't let you leave?'

'Thing.'

'What thing?'

'In Catcher's basement.'

Catcher. Roz clacked her tongue, remembered the name.

'Tell me,' she said. 'Tell me what it looked like.'

‘Can’t. Didn’t look like anything. Just felt it.’ Daniel’s eyes began to water, and Roz realized that he hadn’t blinked in over a minute. ‘Felt. Like whispering. All over my body.’

Something clicked. Roz reached over and took Daniel’s arm, gently tugging him to his feet. He looked puzzled.

‘Come on,’ said Roz.

‘Where are we going?’

She put a forefinger to her lips. ‘To reclaim some lost property. Now, shhh.’

Find the Negress. Find the witch-woman.

The whisper stretched along Paris Street, and out into the alleyways. Where the Renewal Society walked, people watched, hearing the word of the lore. Erskine Morris felt the crowds staring at him as they marched onto Eastern Walk, and felt like screaming at them, *what in the name of bloody Christ are you looking at?* , but he didn’t have the energy even to glare. He wanted to be somewhere else. He couldn’t even recall why he was here. He guessed this state of mind had something to do with ethanol deprivation.

When Monroe had pulled the hood over his face – and the other Renewalists of the ‘inner circle’ had followed, like sheep or madmen – Erskine had expected the crowds to laugh, to walk away, to throw things at them. They hadn’t.

They had a mission. And all of Woodwicke knew it.

Find the Negress. Find the witch-woman.

There was Hell to pay.

**PART TWO**

**MADNESS, MADNESS,THEY CALL IT**

**MADNESS**

‘ *… but when examining the early history of UNIT we still tend to focus on the "big two" invasion attempts; the now-famous London Underground episode, and the Cyberman landing of the following year. Those of us interested in UNIT’s media liaison may even note the importance of the so-called*

*"Wakefield Affair", while those who have studied the records a little more closely might know that UNIT had its roots in the Intrusion Counter Measures Group, which – as we shall see in chapter 3 – played a major part in the Shoreditch Incident of 1963... [but] we tend to forget that secret government departments are by no means a new phenomenon, and are not unique to our own age. Espionage agencies and military intelligence groups have thrived in Europe since the Elizabethan period, and if one wishes to understand the true origins of UNIT C19, the ICMG, or even wartime groups like LONGBOW one has to look to the eighteenth century, not the twentieth... '*

*– K. S. Lethbridge-Stewart,* ***The Zen Military – A History of***

***UNIT*** *(2006, unpublished)*

*' I saw the cover of a pornographic magazine, a picture of a half-dressed woman and the caption, "I'M NAKED INSIDE".*

*And I thought, yes, aren't we all?'*

*– Claire Tennant,* ***A Practical Change of Perspectives*** *(1987)* **5**

**Directory Enquiries**

The rumours began on Hazelrow Avenue.

They'd been talking about the 'happenings' in the church, they'd been talking about the menaces of witchcraft and necromancy and Satanic science (and in this day and age, too, someone had said), they'd been talking about the things that had been seen and the guesses that had been made. Somebody had started explaining the dark rites of the diabolists, describing a series of bizarre blood-rituals that they'd read about in a book somewhere. They drank the blood of babies, these witches, sacrificed infants on unholy altars.

And a passer-by had heard that, heard just a snippet of the conversation. He'd walked all the way up Hazelrow Avenue, telling everybody he met. Dead babies. Drinking blood. By the time the story arrived at the end of the street, most decent, right-minded people thought they understood the situation perfectly.

By half past ten, keys were turning in the locks of children's rooms, bolts were being drawn across doors, and parents were anxiously standing guard at windows. And so the rumours spread.

The boarding-house was a grubby, tick-infested pit, but the average

American brute would doubtless have called it luxurious. Tourette crouched by the side of his malodorous bed, tugging at the floor, ignoring the screeching protests of the *ignorantlandladypeasantbitch* from downstairs. The loose board by the card table came away easily – Tourette had done this enough times in the last few months – and the metal box slid smoothly out of its hidden nesting-place in the floor. The box opened at his touch, as ever. Diabolically clever technology, worthy of a top-ranking secret agent.

Tourette turned the crank on the device inside, keyed in a coded sequence of letters, then began to tap out his report. The machine turned the words into galvanistic impulses and dispatched them across the Atlantic at unimaginable speeds.

Tourette had no idea how it was done – the device had no wires or cables, and the replies usually arrived within minutes, sometimes seconds – but his superiors at the Directory claimed that the device had been salvaged from one of the

'visitations' of the monstrous *caillou*, which no doubt explained everything.

Not the Directory, he corrected himself. Napoleon was running the show now. The real Directory was gone, and only its Shadow remained. Tourette had heard his superiors mumble that Bonaparte had no idea how powerful the Shadow Directory was, or he would never have allowed it to survive when he'd grasped the whole of France in his ugly midget's talon.

Tourette was immensely proud of that metaphor.

The machine clacked and juddered, spewing out strips of paper marked with inky black letters. The reply. Another coded sequence, then words.

SSM13GTOU AGENT TOURETTE REPORT

RECEIVED AND INTERPRETED DO NOT MOVE DO

NOT ACT CHIRURGEON IN PHILADELPHIA ALREADY

ALERTED CHIRURGEON ON HIS WAY REPORT LATER

SSM13EN

Tourette gaped. But gaped heroically, of course. They were sending a

*chirurgeon*? His fingers tapped at the machine again, informing his superiors that there was no need, that he was quite capable of looking after the situation on his own.

The reply took mere seconds to arrive.

SSM13GTR REPEAT CHIRURGEON ALREADY

ALERTED CHIRURGEON ON HIS WAY REPORT LATER

SSM13EN

He shook his head. Not a *chirurgeon*. Surely not. That would be terribly messy, wouldn't it? And unnecessary –

The device chattered again.

SSM13 LA VERITE EST LA DEHORS SSM13EN

Tourette sighed. Dramatically.

' *La vérité est là dehors*,' he repeated, formally.

'You're a psychic?' the user called Chris Cwej was saying. 'Is that what you mean?'

The woman who had identified herself as Marielle Duquesne looked puzzled. 'I do not recognize the term. Earlier this evening, I... heard someone else use the word.'

'Psychic. It means sort of, um, gifted. That's what we call them in my time. "The Gifted". Like you can read minds and make things move just by thinking about it.'

'I cannot do any of these things, Christopher. Surely, you would think them impossible?'

The TARDIS interface watched the exchange carefully, with an eye that it had surreptitiously planted in the ceiling of one of the cloisters. While the interface was active – and the Cwej individual had never unplugged it, of course – it had a duty to warn its user of any threat within the TARDIS

environment. Cwej was its user now, it had concluded. The disruptions to the ship's structure were a threat. That much was simple.

But this Duquesne woman. What was it supposed to make of her?

Interface decided that there was some kind of complex social interplay between Cwej and Duquesne that it hadn't been programmed to understand. It had a good working knowledge of human culture, plus a decent facsimile of a human voice, complete with a full range of sighs and nervous

'ums' and 'ahs', but beyond that... it didn't have human perspectives, human thought-processes, human priorities. It didn't have a human personality.

So it decided to make itself one. That wasn't difficult, really. It seized a few spare strands of the TARDIS's intelligence and began knotting together the loose ends, using its observations of previous TARDIS occupants as neural knitting-patterns.

'How far have you travelled?' Duquesne asked.

'Hard to say,' Cwej answered. 'I mean, it's not just distance, it's time. How do you measure how far you've gone in time? You kind of lose your grip on the universe, when you're a drifter in the vortex.' Oh, very deep, Interface thought. Very profound. What do you do for an encore, ponder on the senselessness of existence in a basically uncaring universe?

Yes. This personality was working out quite nicely.

'You said you were from a thousand years in the future,'

prompted Duquesne.

Prompted? Interface narrowed its eyes, roundels squinting all over the ship. The woman was pumping Cwej for information, often in subtle and roundabout ways. Parts of the new personality had been modelled on the former TARDIS

user called McShane, so Interface knew a thing or two about manipulation.

It closed its eyes. It needed information. Much more information. Interface let its consciousness waltz through the suburbs of the ship's psychosphere, occasionally peeking into the various data storage facilities that littered the systems. The

'data banks'? No, no good. Just glorified encyclopaedias, really,

compiled by Time Lords and largely inaccurate. The

'data core', then? Emergency procedures and technical specifications for the TARDIS, nothing interesting there.

'Information banks'? Out-of-date stellar data. 'Memory store'? Full of historical records, but records of the way the Doctor thought history *should* have happened, rather than the way it *did* happen. Accounts of his adventures with fictional characters like Old Father Time and Abslom Daak. Hopeless.

Interface drew closer to the heart of the TARDIS, realizing that if it wanted *real* information, it would have to go deeper, into those parts of the ship [Abandon Hope All Ye Who Enter Here] that were beyond simple physical electronics. Suddenly, it was floating through [Don't Let The Sun Set On You Here, Program] a teleplasmic minefield, telepathic messages exploding against its [If You Can Read This, You Are Too Close] consciousness. Warning messages; the core systems had [Turn Back! Turn Back!] surrounded themselves with defences like this, designed to keep out alien intruders, or perhaps [No Entry To Unauthorized Personnel] just to keep out the Doctor and stop him fiddling. But Interface had been here [Trespassers Will Be Eaten] before, and it knew a thing or two about...

... ah. It was over. Interface found itself floating before a ring of sub-intelligences – to the new personality, they looked almost like faces in the teleplasm, like stone heads that had been waiting there since the beginning of time – and at the centre of the circle was an intelligence so gigantic and abstract that Interface could only bear to look at it out of the corner of an imaginary eye. And even *that* huge sentience was just a tiny sliver of the Matrix, a point of contact between the TARDIS

and the repository of all Time's wisdom.

'About a thousand,' Cwej was saying, but he seemed a universe away now. 'I don't think I'm supposed to tell you about that kind of thing, though.'

'I understand.'

Politely, Interface addressed the guardians, asking them for an audience, and part of its new personality told it not to be such a crawler. The guardians replied in words that defied language, asking Interface what it wanted, and making it clear that it had better be good.

Psychics, Interface told them. Tell me about psychics. With particular reference to Earth, Europe, France. Second millennium AD, if you know what AD is, and let's face it, you know everything, don't you?

The request was such a small one, so insignificant on the cosmic scale perceived by the Matrix, that the intelligence hardly even noticed as the stone heads turned inwards and sucked the relevant information out of the system.

Walter Monroe squinted at the world through the slits of his mask. There were people following the Renewalists along Eastern Walk, at a respectful distance, so as not to appear too curious. He caught the look in the eye of a medicine-peddler, and it looked almost like fear. Damned funny thing. Hadn't he ever seen a man in a mask before?

Irrational impulse. As Mr Catcher had expected. Well, they'd soon learn.

There was a stall in front of him, a wide wooden cabinet engraved with crude astrological symbols, meaningless stars and planets, unrestrained by constellations. A man in a pointed hat and a gaudy waistcoat looked up, saw Monroe coming, jumped. Then smiled.

'Evening,' he said, nervously.

Monroe indicated the stall. 'This is your, your *thing*, is it?'

The man – Ormond, that was his name – looked at the stall, and coughed. 'Yes, it's mine. Well, sort of mine Me and Mr Wieland from the bank, we thought it would be fun –'

'What does this mean?'

'What, the symbols?' The man looked lost for words.

'Well, I don't really know. Sort of mystical, isn't it? Stars and planets. We do conjuring-tricks. Just in the evenings. Bit of fun.' He produced a single playing-card from his pocket, and attempted to make it vanish into thin air. It resolutely failed to disappear. Ormond smiled sheepishly.

Monroe grunted. God's teeth, did the man not know the consequences of what he was doing? 'You know what happened at the church, presumably?'

'What? Oh. Yes. Peter McLeod said –'

‘Diabolists.’ Monroe was sure the background noise of the town diminished as he spoke the unholy word. ‘Don’t suppose you know anything?’

‘Who, me?’ Ormond looked entirely put out. ‘Well, no.’

‘Do you know the wi...’ Monroe bit his tongue, and cleared the spittle out of his throat. ‘The *so-called* witch-woman?’

‘The African? Well, she... I don’t know her, no. I mean, I’ve spoken to her. That’s her tent there. That one. Look.’

Monroe turned. One of the other Renewalists already had his head inside the tent, searching for some trace of the Negress. Turning back, Monroe noticed the way the rest of the townspeople were slowly moving away from Ormond’s stall.

As if the symbols had suddenly taken on a whole new significance.

‘Fornication,’ he heard Erskine Morris mutter. The man’s voice was unusually quiet, and Monroe noticed that he wasn’t wearing his hood. He frowned. Bad form. Didn’t look like a rationalist at all.

The interview was long, irrational, and went round in circles.

Eventually, Catcher asked for the hall to be cleared, and was surprised how quickly the council complied. Isaac Penley had been the last out, shutting the doors behind him and apologizing all the way into the corridor.

‘You could try beating it out of me,’ said a voice with a slight Highland accent. ‘A shame to waste the opportunity, now you’ve disposed of all the witnesses.’

Catcher’s attention snapped back to the little man who was tied to the chair, an agent of Cacophony bound by the forces of Reason. Flippant even now. Chillingly typical.

‘I know you,’ said Catcher. ‘I know who you are.’

The prisoner regarded him curiously. ‘Really? Good. That saves half an introduction. Of course, I usually just say my name’s "Smith", if anyone asks, but I’ve been thinking about finding another pseudonym. It’s getting dangerously close to becoming my real name. And you are...’

‘Catcher,’ replied Catcher, without thinking He felt something click inside his head, as if the Watchmakers were tightening the springs to stop him saying too much.

‘Catcher. As in "rat". And am I to understand that you’re the leader of the local scientific alcoholics society?’

Catcher felt himself nod before he even understood the words. The springs tightened further.

‘Interesting.’ The man was staring right into Catcher’s face, as though looking for some small but significant detail. ‘You know, for the leader of a cult, you’re not terribly charismatic.

Your oratory style seems rather mechanical, if your addresses to the council are anything to go by. I wonder what the appeal is?’

‘Reason is with me,’ Catcher announced, but somehow the words just didn’t sound majestic enough.

‘Hmmm. More likely that your followers are finding it hard to adapt to this century’s change in attitude, and you’re exploiting their vulnerability. Even so, I’d say there’s more to you than meets the eye. I wonder what your secret is?’

Catcher felt his muscles stiffen. He experienced a sudden and irrational impulse to hit the man, to take him up on his suggestion of beating the truth out of him He suppressed it. I AM RATIONAL. I AM IN CONTROL.

‘You’re not in control,’ said the prisoner, casually. ‘And why did you want me alone, I wonder? Afraid of the impression I might make on the council?’

‘Cacophony must be isolated,’ Catcher said. He was satisfied with that. For a moment, he felt the springs in his head loosen, but then the man was staring at him again.

Staring at him with eyes of an irrational colour.

‘Who are you working for?’ the diabolist asked.

They were walking through the maze of paving-slabs that had once been the cloisters, past an enormous collection of mounted insect specimens that had become embedded in a marble fountain. There was a hollow ticking sound from beneath their feet, suggesting that

something was trapped under the stones and scratching its way towards the surface, but they were trying to ignore it. Occasionally a chunk of masonry would float across their path, and they'd stop to let it go by. Duquesne was deliberately keeping to Cwej's left.

'The TARDIS is supposed to have defences that stop this kind of thing happening,' Cwej was saying, like a man apologizing for an untidy house. 'There's something that takes the ship out of space and time if anyone tampers with it, and there's something else that's meant to stop us materializing in the middle of volcanoes or in the paths of aeroplanes or anything. I don't know if it's still working, though.'

'Ah,' said Duquesne, flatly.

'My guess is, there's some kind of extra-dimensional thing at work here. It's probably kidnapped Roz and the Doctor. It probably wants to take over the universe.'

Duquesne looked alarmed. 'You sound very casual, Christopher.'

'Do I? I dunno. After a while, it all seems kind of natural.'

He nodded to himself. 'Anyway, whoever's behind this, they'll probably show themselves soon. There's going to be a face-off. There always is.'

'You no doubt know best,' said Duquesne, without any apparent humour.

'So, I think we should be armed. The only working weapons on board that I know about are in Roz's quarters.

That means we'll have to go through the parts of the ship where the life-support's broken down, and that won't be easy.'

They paused as a broken balustrade drifted past. Wolsey the cat sat perched on top of it, licking his backside as if the break-up of the TARDIS was unimportant compared to the state of his furry rear end.

'I was going to ask you –' began Cwej.

Interface felt its personality lurch and skip. In that moment, the data it had requested from the Matrix was pushed into its human-shaped memory, flooding the make-believe synapses.

The experiences of dead Time Lords, and of those few who had been

touched by the Matrix while they still lived. Interface found itself developing new perspectives by the second.

*Frame one*. It was watching a film in a secret screening-room. The film was scratchy, in black and white. The camera had been unsteady. The film showed the interior of a warehouse, where corpses of a hundred different species were suspended in plastic containers. Alien bodies riddled with bullets, disembodied organs sealed in transparent bags by their sides. A group of humans – in twentieth-century military outfits, Interface noted – were sealing up the body of something half-reptilian, half-piscine.

*Frame two*. Interface was in a room, surrounded by the twin scents of blood and ethanol, the area cluttered with primitive surgical tools. It was watching an autopsy, two men hacking into a bleached humanoid on a blood-flecked table.

The men were making notes; the body had two hearts and a respiratory bypass system, not to mention an enormous gaping wound in its right leg. They occasionally turned to Interface and asked questions.

What Time Lord had witnessed this, it wondered?

*Frame three*. Interface was in a darkened office, searching a filing cabinet by torchlight. It found itself flicking through documents labelled ' *majestueux*' reading reports of monsters and anomalies, most of them dated between 1790 and 1840.

Two words kept reappearing throughout the reports, the name of the organization that had been involved in all of these operations.

*Shadow Directory*.

In a corridor on another level of the TARDIS, one of the roundels frowned.

'– was that true, what you told me before?' said Cwej.

'About just, y'know, wandering into the TARDIS?'

Marielle Duquesne paused. 'No,' she admitted. 'It was not.

Your ship called me here. At least, it attracted me in a way I could not resist. Pardon me, Christopher. I am... embarrassed by such things.'

Interface watched her, observing the tiny tell-tale movements she made, revealing that she was still hiding something. The concept of body language was new to the software, but it wasn't hard to get to grips with.

Secret societies, thought Interface. Shadow Directory. It wondered if it should tell Cwej, and if so, then how.

Something was happening in the town. Something big, and brutal, and unexpected. There were weird stories, rumours about violence and witchery. Daniel Tremayne didn't know how he knew all that; he just *felt* it, like everything the town experienced had been filtered through his body first.

He tried telling the woman, but he couldn't find the right words. Whenever he tried to speak, she just nodded, and said they should stay out of sight. They were moving through the alleyways now, slowly and cautiously, heading for Catcher's house without using any of the main streets.

*And why in the name of God are you going back there, Daniel Tremayne?*

'Because it's the only thing you can do,' said the woman, though Daniel hadn't realized he'd been speaking aloud. He watched the African out of the corner of his eye. Wasn't she a little too friendly, for one of her kind? She acted with a kind of authority as well, like a councillor or a watchman would have done; but it was like she hadn't used her authority for a long time, and kept forgetting how she should talk to him.

'Didn't mean to say anything,' said Daniel.

'That's OK,' said the woman. Forrester. She'd said her name was Forrester. 'You don't like talking, do you? Funny.

You seemed conversational enough the first time we met.'

'Everything's different now.' He slipped out onto a side-street, Forrester right behind him.

'You just want to get on with your life, is that it? That strikes me as odd. It's not like your life seems that great.' She clenched her teeth. 'Sorry. Didn't mean it to sound that offensive.'

Daniel Tremayne shrugged. 'Don't want to get caught up in any of this. Don't want to stick my head up so as I get noticed.

You in the War?'

There was a moment's silence from Forrester. 'No. Not the one you mean.'

'Saw what happened to them when they fought the War.

Got hurt. Killed. Should've seen them, covered in sick and dirt.'

'Who?'

'The ones who fought the English. You can't go up against things like that, things like the English. Like going up against the weather.' He was pleased with the way he'd put that, but the woman didn't look impressed. As they slipped into another alley, he caught a puzzled expression on her face.

'They won, though, didn't they?' she said. 'Someone told me that the Americans beat the shite out of the British. I think those were the words he used, anyway.'

'That's what the soft people say, that they won the War and changed everything. World still looks the same to me, though.'

Again, he found himself wondering how he knew what the world had looked like *before* the War, but he decided to keep the thought to himself. 'The English. The Revolution. People, people like me, we can't do anything about them. They do what they like, the Presidents and the Kings and all. They make the world, we just live in the cracks. Got to keep our heads down or they get shot right off.'

Forrester sniffed. 'When history goes overhead, duck.'

'Hahh. That's right.' Daniel nodded to himself. He was starting to get a grip on this witch-woman.

And maybe she caught that thought, because she said: 'You don't believe in witches, though, do you?'

'Don't believe anything. Don't believe in God. Don't believe in the Devil.' He shook his head. 'Or maybe I do. The Revolution, that's just like a God. Can't understand why it does what it does, can't do anything about it. The Devil, the English, what's the difference?'

Forrester went quiet after that. Daniel wondered what she was thinking

Just like home, just like the thirtieth century. The whole universe run by an Empire. Not by people, just by an Empire, and no one can do a damn thing about it. We don't believe in gods and demons. He's got the English to be scared of, I've got the Empress.

Goddess, and I used to believe in the Empire, didn't I?

Right up until the point when the Empire tried to kill me off.

Right up to the point when the Doctor showed his face in Overcity Five.

I'm going to have to go back, sometime. Aren't I?

Don't think about that now.

And the kid's right. Something's happening in this town.

Not like the Doctor said, not some maniac re-building the world with the amaranth. The amaranth I lost. No. The town's going mad on its own. Outside the church, they were talking about all kinds of garbage. Mad scientists. Satanists. This town's making its own monsters.

Maybe it's because it's almost 1800. People go crazy when the numbers change. Like in 2000, when they started launching the old space stations, and there were those riots across Asia and South America. Heard about that the last time I had to stay in the USA, three hundred years from now. And what about 3000? Yeah. Just before me and Chris left, the day we packed up and moved into the TARDIS, the news reports that were coming in... civilization falling apart, rioting in all areas. Uprisings on Solos and Murtaugh. There was that footage from Spaceport Twelve Overcity, whole neighbourhoods on fire, and some of the undercity suckers had started a carnival in the ruins. A carnival. The end of the world comes, and they just want to party. Maybe it's the same in 4000, and 5000. Didn't the Doctor say something about World War VI? People dancing in the ashes of Reykjavik or somewhere?

Who starts the carnivals? Who makes the music?

Prendeville Silkwood had policed Woodwicke for most of his adult life, but he had never, not even in the days of the Revolution, seen anything like this. There were perhaps half a dozen of the men, all dressed in day-to-day clothing, all with ridiculous grey hoods pulled over their faces. The townspeople that stood at a discreet distance around them – a crowd, despite the fact that it was getting on for

eleven – should have been laughing, but they actually seemed to take the overblown (and, in some cases, overweight) figures seriously. As he'd reached the top of Eastern Walk, Silkwood had listened to the whispers that laced the crowd, and heard words that he never thought he'd hear outside of some morally questionable supernatural romance.

'Mr Catcher has already informed the council,' one of the fat hooded men was now telling him. 'We have special powers to deal with this, this *special* situation.'

Silkwood looked around. Somebody – not even one of the hooded men, just an ordinary, God-fearing inhabitant of Woodwicke – was having an argument with John Ormond the banker, hissing and cursing in low and dangerous tones.

Ormond was defending himself by babbling hysterically.

'There is no situation.' Silkwood poured three decades of authority and experience into his voice. 'Whatever happened at the church, sir, is over. It's Christmas Eve, and we should all be at home with our families. I want to see everybody here indoors and off the streets.'

His words were forceful, direct, and spoken with absolute conviction. And he was alarmed to realize that nobody was listening to him.

'We have reason to believe that diabolists are at work among these attractions,' the fat man continued. His spluttering voice suddenly sounded familiar.

'Monroe? Walter Monroe? Is that you?' Silkwood let out a deep and throat-rattling laugh, then tried to pull the man's hood off. Monroe caught him by the wrist.

'Special powers,' he repeated.

There was the sound of a struggle. Silkwood turned his head, his hand still in Monroe's grip. Evidently Ormond had attempted to leave; someone had tried to stop him, and now a few of the townsfolk were clustered around the man, blocking his way. He looked terrified.

'What?' Silkwood heard someone ask. 'What is it you're scared of?'

'Let the man go,' Silkwood demanded. He turned back to Monroe, forced his wrist out of the fool's grip. 'In the name of the Lord, Monroe, what is it you think you're doing?'

But Monroe didn't answer. All around him, Silkwood could hear the sounds of stalls and tents being pulled and poked, searched and dismantled. He felt the crowd move in around him. There was a sharp exclamation from Ormond.

'Why's he trying to get in the way?' someone asked.

The next thing he knew, there was the brief sound of violence. Ormond fell silent.

Someone threw something at the back of Prendeville Silkwood's head.

Matheson Catcher's muscles felt as if they were about to give up entirely, strung taut as mainsprings between his joints. The man had kept asking him questions, and he'd kept answering them without knowing quite why, the Watchmakers occasionally punishing him by tightening the springs a little.

'Tell me about the rituals,' the man said.

'Rituals?' Catcher tried to relax, then realized that he'd never relaxed in his life and didn't know how. 'There are no rituals. Only scientific procedures.'

The man scoffed. 'Whatever you want to call them. How do you tear holes in the rational universe?'

Catcher suppressed the urge to throttle him. 'You are being absurd. I merely reduce physical matter to its simplest form, allowing me to reconstruct the material cosmos according to the patterns of the Wa... of the new order.'

The captive sighed. 'Oh, very well. How do you do it?'

'Intonation.'

'You mean, you chant?'

'Chant! Monks and women chant.' The man frowned at his turn of phrase, but Catcher ignored him. 'The rational order of the universe responds to the harmonics of the intonations –'

'Which are?'

Catcher, determined to win this battle of wills, looked the diabolist straight in the eye and said:

‘ *Io Ordo Ordo Io.* ’

For a second, a tiny corner of reality by the prisoner’s left ear twitched expectantly.

‘Ah. I see.’ The man was nodding. ‘Chanting in binary. The numbers disguised as simple "magic words". A shut-down code for reality. Quantum mnemonics, but without the lethal finesse. Typically human. Everything reduced to the basics.’

Catcher’s mouth clicked open, ready to protest at the word

‘magic’. The man interrupted him:

‘But the codes are too complex for you to have just stumbled across them. I was right, then. Outside assistance.

Who are you working for?’

The big hand of the Great Clock of Time was ticking towards midnight. At least, that was how it felt to Catcher.

‘The Watchmakers,’ he said, sure that the agent of Cacophony would understand, and be afraid.

Instead, the man just pulled a stupid face.

‘The Watchmakers!’ screamed Catcher.

‘You’ve been touched,’ said the diabolist.

‘Yes! Yes!’ At last, he was understanding. ‘Touched by the glory of the Watchmakers. The Great Architects of the universe. The majestic clockwork –’

‘No.’ The man shook his head. ‘Touched by something very powerful and extremely irrational. And I’ve never got on well with Great Architects anyway. Look at yourself, Mr Catcher.’

Catcher found himself looking down. Everything seemed perfectly normal. His clothes were in place. His cravat was tied under his chin in a neat and orderly fashion. His body was trembling slightly, but that was all.

‘You’re becoming a walking anomaly,’ the prisoner told him. ‘Can’t you see it? Your entire biological structure has been affected. It’s nothing you could put your finger on, of course. Put your DNA under

analysis and it would probably make no sense at all, but to the naked eye, everything seems to be in the right place. Don't you understand?'

Catcher realized that he was staring at his hands.

Something crawled across his skin. A clockwork voice in his head told him to close his eyes.

'At least there's one good thing about us meeting like this,'

the man said with appalling cheeriness. 'You must be the one who has my amaranth. Please can I have my ball back?'

'So, why are you here? In America, I mean.'

They were still in the ruined cloisters, trying to ignore the cracks and the clockwork fingertips. They walked past an overturned glass-fronted cabinet which, according to a small bronze plaque set into its base, contained the only stuffed specimen of a De Loys ape in existence. The animal inside was probably the ugliest thing that had ever lived.

'Curiosity,' Duquesne said, wondering how convincing she sounded. 'I have heard that the architects of this nation have an interest in, ahh, unusual practices.'

'Architects?' Cwej blinked at her, blond eyebrows crumpling appealingly. 'Sorry, I don't know much about this time period.'

Duquesne wished he'd stop saying things like that, even if they were true. 'Thomas Jefferson. Thomas Paine. Even George Washington. It's rumoured that they may have practised some form of... how may I put it?'

'Er, witchcraft?' suggested Cwej.

Duquesne sighed. 'If you wish. It is said they practised such things during their revolution.' The word 'revolution'

stuck in her throat, just as it always did. It reminded her of her own nation, and of the fact that her unusual talent was the only reason the French government put up with her. Too useful to be an exile, she thought, too useful for Madame Guillotine. 'I came to America in order to discover more. My, ah, friends have been watching events here for some time '

That had been a slip. Fortunately, Cwej didn't ask who her

'friends' were. He seemed distracted, staring at a cracked wall of grey stone to the right. In those few seconds, his neck was exposed to Duquesne, and she focused on a large pink vein that ran from his jaw to his collar. It almost seemed to pop out at her. An obvious target. One little cut...

She struggled to hold back her Directory training, trying not to remember lessons taught in a lead-lined room.

'Christopher...?' she made herself say.

'Mmm?' He turned back to her, flashing a brief smile. 'Oh, sorry. I just thought I saw that wall blinking at me.'

The stone heads seemed to be frowning. What's the matter, they were saying, can't you hold your information?

Interface lurched drunkenly through the teleplasm, European history rolling across its memory. 1789. The Citizens of Paris began slaughtering the aristocracy, and Interface was there in the crowd as Louis XVI's head fell from his shoulders. Then the mob turned in on itself, and Interface watched the revolutionaries fighting like dogs in a pit.

1794. The original Revolution coughed up its guts and died.

France was now being run by a group called the Directory –

And suddenly, Interface was in a room that stank of mahogany, among the heads of that Directory. They were looking through the records that Citizen Robespierre had kept, reports that the old revolutionaries had tried to incorporate in Robespierre's 'rationalist religion'. The men gasped, horrified, at the descriptions of the weird and other-worldly things that had walked the Earth, evidence from every known continent, from as far away as Terra Australis. Interface watched from a corner, silently, again wondering what Time Lord could possibly have been present.

This is terrible, the men were saying. Such things should not exist. The people must never know. They would panic, we would lose control... and in a matter of hours, it was agreed.

They would seek out those things that went against reason, the monsters and the *caillou* and the visitors from beyond the aether. They

would seek to control them, and if they couldn't control them, they would exterminate them. Another organization was spawned, a secret society, under the Directory's control. Its hidden underbelly. Its Shadow.

With a sudden teleplasmic shock, Interface was back where it had started, watching Cwej and Duquesne walk through the cloisters, talking genially.

'So you've been doing this a while?' Cwej asked. 'Just going from country to country, checking for any of these *caillou* people?'

Duquesne nodded, hesitantly. 'Perhaps it will give me some idea of my own abilities,' she said.

No, Interface wanted to say. She's lying, Cwej. She's not here for her own benefit. Ask her who she's working for.

Cwej thought for a moment. 'So, am I one of these *caillou*?'

A half-smile crossed Duquesne's face. 'Yes, Christopher.

Yes, I suppose you are.'

*And if they couldn't control them, they would exterminate them.* Urgently, Interface began twisting the fabric of the TARDIS, creating a new mouth amongst the ruined cloisters...

Then the big shock came. A pulse, like a surge of electrical energy, coursing through the whole of the ship and sending a shiver through every circuit. At first, Interface thought it was just another side-effect of the 'alien interference', but once the shock was over, it realized that the pulse had come directly from the telepathic circuits of the TARDIS.

The ship had done this itself. Intentionally.

Interface saw Cwej scratch the back of his neck. 'It's funny,' he said. 'I keep getting this memory. Something about frisbees. Something about bank robbers.'

Duquesne looked at him in alarm. 'Frisbees?'

'Oh. It's not important.'

Interface finished making its mouth, and had just opened it when that particular part of the wall broke away from the cloisters and tumbled

into the space where the Eighth Door section had once been.

Roz Forrester had walked past the house before, usually very quickly. It wasn't that the place was frightening, or ominous, or dangerous-looking. It was just generally unpleasant. The frontage had been stripped down so many times that the place seemed like a half-formed thing now, like a zombie of a building. Roz scowled at herself. Stupid metaphor.

They stood in a tiny alley at the side of the house, half-lit by the gaslights of Hazelrow Avenue. The alley was full of bric-à-brac, if bric-à-brac had been invented yet. Daniel was standing by the cellar door, looking around furtively. A born sneak-thief, thought Roz. Someone had closed and locked the door since his last visit.

'Can you open it?'

Daniel glanced over his shoulder at her. His face looked more exhausted than a teenager's was entitled to be, in Roz's opinion. 'I can still hear it. Not as strong, though.'

'Can you open it?'

'You'll make it stop calling me?'

'Let's just get inside. Then we'll see.'

It took no time at all for Daniel to spring the lock, and Roz got the impression that some automatic function of his brain had done all the work. The door creaked open in the traditional melodramatic style. Roz listened. No movement inside.

Daniel didn't want to go in, of course, but she persuaded him with a well-placed poke or two in the back.

The space behind the door was dark, but the darkness began to lift as Roz passed through the entrance, like someone was turning a dimmer-switch in the room on the other side. Or like she was walking through a fog, and the further she went, the thinner it got. All her senses went blurry for a second, and it reminded her of the way she felt whenever she used a transmat beam, or whenever she walked into the –

She walked right into Daniel's back. He'd stopped dead, and Roz noticed how tense his body had become. Then she looked over his shoulder into the cellar, and her body tensed up, too.

It was as though the normal architecture of the building had been forced aside, and replaced by something much larger and much more impressive; something with cream-coloured walls, indented with crater-like circles, and lit with an off-white glow that came from nowhere in particular. There was even a console in the centre of the room, a hexagonal surface supported by a metallic trunk. The place was darker than it should have been, though, much darker, shadows everywhere.

Daniel started making tiny clucking noises in the back of his throat. Roz took another look around the room, feeling the vibration that ran through the structure, the atmosphere that practically buzzed in her ear. She knew. She didn't know how, but she knew one thing for certain about this place.

'This isn't a TARDIS,' she said. 'It just *looks* like one.'

She stepped forward, around the frozen form of Daniel, examining the walls, the floor, the corners. The TARDIS was a constructed thing, perfect in every geometric detail, but here... the angles were all in the right places, but there was a sense of randomness built into it. Effortless. That was the word. Effortless.

She turned to Daniel. He stared at her with wet, uncomprehending eyes.

'TARDISes are built,' she told him, knowing he wouldn't understand a word she was saying. 'This one just *happened*.'

The town was panicking. Erskine Morris had never seen that before, an entire town panicking.

He couldn't recall exactly what had taken place on Eastern Walk, though he was dimly aware that it had only happened five minutes ago. The watchman, Silkwood, had turned up.

More rumours, more whispers. Someone had asked Erskine what was going on, and where the diabolists were, but he hadn't even had the energy to swear at them. Someone else asked whether Silkwood was in league with the forces of Satan. Silkwood! Silkwood, for Christ's sake, the man who'd once arrested a six-year-old child for showing its nipples in public!

There had been brief flurries of movement. Scuffles.

Fisticuffs. Things had been thrown. Erskine wondered if he'd been one

of the throwers, then decided that it was an utterly ludicrous idea. By all the ravaged nuns in Hell, what was he, a barbarian?

'She's not here,' one of the skinny Renewalists said. 'The witch-woman isn't here.'

Erskine looked around, dazed. He was moving along Eastern Walk. No, he wasn't moving, he was being moved.

The people around him were creating a current of urgency, and he was letting himself be dragged along by it.

'Witch-doctors. Didn't I tell you? We should never have let the niggers get this close to the town.'

'The what?'

'That's what they call them in the south.'

'Peter McLeod said there was a whole coven of 'em.'

'What's a coven?'

Damnation, thought Erskine, this was absurd. They were talking about witches and warlocks, things that didn't exist –

*In the labyrinth.*

– why didn't Monroe and the others do something, instead of breeding this pointless medieval hysteria –

*In the labyrinth, you walked right through it.*

– and where was Monroe, anyway?

As if in answer to his question, a portly hooded shape drew up alongside him. The shape said nothing, just nodded as if they shared some secret understanding, and pressed a wad of sackcloth into Erskine's hand.

Erskine felt the current pushing him towards the 'African quarter' on the north side of town, where the blacks and the outcasts lived in their paper-walled piss-drenched houses. He saw the people, closing ranks around the Renewalists, looking at him with a mixture of fear and respect. He looked at the mask in his hand.

He wondered if people would leave him alone if he put it on.

**Non-Interventionist Policy (Yeah, Sure)** The bodies of three young children had been found in an alleyway near Eastern Walk. Their throats had been slit, the blood drained from their bodies. One of them (or was it all of them?) had been ritualistically disembowelled.

At least, that's what they were saying on Paris Street.

Nobody seemed to know who these children had been, or where the corpses were now. Those who lived on Eastern Walk might have been puzzled that they hadn't seen any such bodies, or heard a single word said about their supposed discovery.

One know-it-all from Hazelrow Avenue said he wasn't at all surprised to hear about the horrific child murders. The Negroes did this sort of thing all the time back in Africa, he said. In fact, witch-doctors in the jungle regularly impaled youngsters and used their blood and intestines in their dark rituals...

By eleven o'clock, the search for the witch-woman had become a little more urgent.

Many things were taught in the lead-lined rooms. *caillou* artefacts would be revealed to the Shadow Directory's students. On occasion, pain would be ceremonially inflicted on the initiates, as a test of character or a *rite de passage*. Agents would be given their new weaponry, and shown the basic arts of scalpel-wielding. The archons of the Directory would visit from their dioceses in Bayern or Philadelphia, giving the students the benefit of their experience.

The most intriguing lectures were those delivered by Professor Hulot of Orléans. It was the Professor's belief that many of the *caillou* existed in 'more than three dimensions', though how there could possibly be more than three dimensions, nobody but the Professor seemed to know. He claimed that the physical form of a *caillou* was a mere fragment of its vast 'multi-dimensional' form, and that – like the proverbial iceberg – most of it went unseen by the human eye, existing in a mysterious realm he liked to call 'meta-space'.

The Professor would point out (at great length, as any of his students would testify) that wherever a *caillou* was found, remarkable coincidences would occur. 'When a *caillou*'s life is threatened, or it finds itself in a situation where escape seems impossible, curious episodes transpire as if by chance,'

he'd written in his treatise *On the Habits and Occupations of Astral Personages*. 'Weather conditions inexplicably change, distracting the enemy long enough for the *caillou* to slip away.

Mysterious third parties just happen to pass by, inadvertently saving the *caillou* from its fate. Even when they are put in a place of confinement, doors which are thought to be secure are found to have been left unlocked, and competent guards look the other way at precisely the wrong moment.'

Professor Hulot would insist that these things weren't accidents at all; the *caillou*'s invisible influence was at work in

'meta-space', he'd claim, pushing people and objects into convenient places, though its three-dimensional form might seem to be 'sitting on its backside doing nothing at all'.

The Professor would point to one well-documented case, of a *caillou* who visited Paris in 1791. The creature had appeared as a grey-haired old man, but at least three witnesses had seen him arrive in a miraculous metal box which had later transmogrified itself into a wooden barricade, as if to avoid detection. The old man had taken a great interest in the Revolution, and several of Robespierre's agents – posing as common citizens, *naturellement* – had spoken with him.

Transcripts of the interviews had fallen into the hands of the Directory, who had examined the man's speech, finding it packed with pointless witticisms and atrocious English puns.

'Something to draw me out of my shell, hmmm?' he'd said at one point, when offered an egg sandwich.

But though seemingly childish, the Professor claimed that these puns were in fact parts of complex equations that related to events beyond human perception. In the Professor's terms, by making 'verbal connections' between events, the *caillou* was 'completing circuits in meta-space'. 'They seem uncommonly lucky, but that luck is merely a manifestation of their great and unearthly experience,' Hulot wrote. 'The older they get, the more extreme the coincidences that surround them become.'

It is perhaps hardly surprising that the Professor was considered to be something of an eccentric by his peers. It is surely significant, however, that mere hours after the joke about the egg sandwich had been made, the old man and his young travelling companion escaped from a Parisian military post using explosives from an artillery shell

(the Professor always stressed the word *shell*) that had 'accidentally' been left in some dark corner of the building...

The agent called Raphael had never particularly cared for Professor Hulot, but then neither had his other teachers. This is why Raphael had become a *chirurgeon* instead of a field agent, why he'd been given the sharpest scalpel the Directory had to offer, and why he was now sweeping into the town of Woodwicke like an elemental force with the killing lessons foremost in his head.

'Reason,' demanded Matheson Catcher.

The Doctor sighed theatrically. Thirty-four-and-a-half minutes tied to a chair, and the interrogation was still getting him nowhere. He decided to try a different approach.

'Very well. Let's talk about reason. Sorry, Reason.'

Somehow, the capital letter seemed to change the entire tone of the sentence. 'Would you like to hear a story?'

'A story?' The Doctor could have sworn he heard whirring, clanking sounds from inside the man's head.

'Once upon a time...' the Doctor began.

'A *story*?' repeated Catcher. Obviously, something had got stuck inside that clockwork brain of his. I must have wound him up, the Doctor thought. 'Fairy-tales. Not rational. No basis in scientific theory.'

'That's a pity. I was going to tell you about the Glass Eaters of the Anterides. The people who reasoned themselves to death. They moved in tighter and tighter circles of logic until they finally disappeared up their own Socratic methodologies.

Perhaps you'd prefer a story with killer robots in it.' Again, the whirring in Catcher's head. No, thought the Doctor, I'm imagining it. It's easy to imagine things like that around this man. 'I want to know what you call rational, Mr Catcher. Why do you do what you do? What's the reason behind your Reason?'

'The will of the Watchmakers. There is only one Reason.'

The Doctor sighed once more. 'There aren't any Watchmakers, don't you see? At least, not in any sense but the metaphorical one.'

He was sure that Catcher's eyes flickered around the hall then, searching the corners, as if looking for proof that the Doctor was wrong.

'There is only Reason. What else could there be?'

The Doctor shook his head. He could feel it, spreading across the town; the fifth law of thermodynamics in full effect.

*Everything always gets slightly worse*. 'Do you really want to know?'

Catcher cocked his head again.

'Close your eyes,' the Doctor said.

The cloisters had ended abruptly, in a blank white wall that (a) jarred with the classical architecture and (b) wasn't supposed to be there anyway. Chris had led Marielle Duquesne through a tall gothic archway, pretending that he knew exactly where he was going. Now they found themselves in the middle of the seemingly endless corridor that was generally known as the TARDIS library.

'Library?' queried Marielle.

Chris pulled a face. 'Sort of. You say "library" and you expect it to have some kind of order. You know. Alphabetical filing.' He shrugged, and indicated the untidy heaps of books that littered the floor for as far as the eye could see. 'I don't think it was supposed to be a library, originally. I think the Doctor just kept shovelling old books in here until it got that name. He told me once that he'd spent twenty-six years putting them in order, stacking them on the shelves and everything. He said it was the best meditation of his life. I guess they must have come un-ordered again.'

But even by its usual standards, the library was a mess.

Huge cracks ran across the floor, chunks of the corridor breaking off to form small islands of marble, furnished with cabinets and bookshelves. In the gaps between the sections, there was only darkness. The bad kind of darkness, Chris thought.

They started to move up the corridor, keeping to the more obviously stable sections of the floor. Encyclopaedias and compact discs fluttered past like moths. A cat with silver fur crouched in a dissolving alcove, its skin like mercury, and Chris knew at a glance that it was a TARDIS-spawned thing.

He saw Wolsey creeping up behind the quicksilver animal, attempting to sniff its arse. Just as he was about to succeed, the silver cat exploded into a shower of red, blue, and green pixels. Wolsey looked grumpy and floated off on a loose tile.

'This is the way to Roslyn's quarters?' Marielle asked.

There it was again. That niggling feeling that the woman was remembering everything, making notes. Chris still wasn't sure he trusted her. To make matters worse, he didn't even fancy her much. She wasn't bad looking, but she just seemed kind of distant, like she wanted to be somewhere else all the time.

Well, all right. So maybe that was understandable.

'It's, er, one way,' he told her.

'How many paths are there through this machine?'

'Oh, hundreds. Thousands.' A thought suddenly struck him

'Hang on. You said the ship was communicating with you, right?'

She nodded. 'It may be.'

'Cool.' That was a word he'd picked up from twenty-first century America, and he was very happy with it. 'So you've got a kind of instinct for the ship? Like a kind of empathy?'

'I wouldn't say empathy, Christopher. But...'

'But there's a kind of contact?'

She nodded.

'Great. Can you, sort of, listen to it? See if it's saying anything? I only mention it because we're in the library, and I'm sure the Doctor said something about the library being telepathic. Something about it being able to find books for you, if you asked it properly. He calls it the Library Angel.'

Marielle looked bewildered. Chris felt he was having difficulty communicating with her properly. He couldn't remember how you were supposed to speak to people from this time-zone; in America, he'd seen a TV mini-series set in the early nineteenth century, and that was about as far as his experience stretched. The programme had been inspired by novels like *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*, but

the producers had managed to strip costume drama down to its bare essentials, so the series had been called *Fights and Cleavage*.

'Saying?' Marielle queried. 'I'm not sure I understand. The machine does not use words.'

'The TARDIS doesn't use words. But the interface does.

Just listen.'

So she listened. Chris watched, and waited, as a puzzled frown crossed her face.

Something rippled through the library, riding on a wave of liquid intelligence. Chris saw Marielle's hand shoot towards the base of her spine, and she made a tiny gasping sound that under any other circumstances Chris would have found quite appealing. He, meanwhile, found himself thinking about his dad throwing a frisbee. Again, he had no idea why.

Marielle was looking at him, eyes wide in the dark hollows of her face. 'A voice. English, I think.' A frown. 'It does not seem to like me.'

'What did it say?'

'It said... use the secret passage.'

'What?'

And there was a sound, a popping, springing, boinging sound. Like the noise you hear when a cartoon character gets hit in the face by a brick. Chris had heard it before; the TARDIS occasionally made it when there was a minor systems fault, or when the Doctor thumped the console too hard. The sound was so absurd that Chris had always assumed the TARDIS was making it purely for the benefit of its human passengers.

Now the sound was ringing through the library, a hundred times louder than he'd ever heard it before, and books were hopping like jumping beans to its echo. The part of the corridor where they were standing was breaking away from the rest of the ship. The larger sections of flooring pulled themselves apart, the smaller sections turned to dust. Islands broke apart and formed smaller islands. Marielle yelped.

Again, under other circumstances, it was a sound Chris would have

appreciated.

Once, there'd been another witch-woman. Out on the other side of the state, when Daniel had still belonged to a town, or *almost* belonged to one. The town had been five or six families big, families who knew him so well that he'd just had to move from house to house to stay alive, instead of town to town.

They must have felt sorry for him, what with his father having been carted off to the funny-house when the War was in full swing, when nobody took the time to look after the mad ones.

He'd played with the other boys, stayed clear of the girls, pretending to be part of one family or another for as long as he thought he could get away with it, ten years old and learning to live in the cracks already.

A small town. Five or six families, and a witch-woman.

The woman had been white, and her face had looked like the world had grabbed hold of her loose skin and tried to pull her down into the ground. She'd worn things in her hair.

'Coon charms', one of the men in the town had said, grinning with green-speckled teeth when he'd said it. The woman had owned a garden, where she'd grown herb-plants like the ones the Indians used, and she'd let the boys play there, in the remains of the older buildings that backed onto her house.

Games in the ruins. Building things out of the rubble. The woman would watch them and nod, like she'd been happy that they knew how to make things, like she'd thought the world had needed more things to be made, since the War had broken so many.

The boys had played in the foundations until one day they'd grown up too much to play there anymore. That was when they'd started playing *inside* the witch-woman's house, creeping in at night to break the bigger 'coon charms' inside, throwing stones at it by day. No one had noticed when the old games had stopped and the new games had started, but the other men and women in the town had watched it happen because no one trusted a witch-woman and they'd never liked her anyway. She'd stopped showing her face after that.

Stopped even coming to the windows.

One day, Daniel Tremayne had crept into the house, stolen the most

expensive things he'd been able to find, and run out of the town. He'd needed to get away from that place, more than he needed to get out of Woodwicke. He hadn't known why.

And now there was Forrester. She was moving around Catcher's cellar with short, careful steps, taking in every little detail. She stopped in front of a shelf, stacked high with books, heavy and bound in black hide. She took one down and opened it.

Daniel looked over her shoulder. He couldn't read, of course, but he'd seen enough books to know what letters were supposed to look like, and the symbols scratched into the pages just weren't right. He thought maybe it was some foreign language, then realized that whenever his eyes moved across the paper, the letters moved too.

'Odd,' Forrester said. 'They look just like the Doctor's old time-logs, but it's like they've been scrambled.'

She was talking to herself, obviously. Daniel kept quiet. 'In fact, everything here's been scrambled,' she continued, replacing the book and moving towards the altar-thing in the middle of the room. 'A- *ha*.'

Then she was reaching into the glass column at the centre of the table. Daniel held his breath, waiting for... what? An explosion? Worse? 'Like I said. Lost property.'

She turned around. In her hands was a sphere, about the size of a child's ball, its colour half-way between gold and bronze. 'This is beginning to add up,' she said. 'Your Catcher must have used the amaranth to build this place. Question is, why does it look like a TARDIS? What is he, another renegade Time Lord? Goddess, the universe must be stuffed with them.'

The sentences made no sense to Daniel. Lord Jesus Christ, did he *want* them to make sense? Did he *want* to get caught up in all of this?

'My guess is, the amaranth is linked to the TARDIS. That'd make sense, most of the Doctor's toys are. So, when Catcher did his magic ritual or whatever it was, the amaranth rebuilt this place according to the pattern it was most familiar with.

The TARDIS pattern.' Forrester paused, thinking 'Hold on. If this place, this UnTARDIS, is linked to the amaranth as well...'

She walked across to one of the walls, and stroked it gently.

The surface bubbled, shifted, a tiny portion of the wall collapsing in on itself. Daniel Tremayne winced.

'Right,' said Forrester. 'So the TARDIS and the UnTARDIS are linked together, via the amaranth. The UnTARDIS is unstable, because the amaranth can only build temporary structures. So the TARDIS is unstable as well.

That's what's causing the ship to break down. Does that make sense?'

'I don't care,' said Daniel, hardly noticing that he'd spoken aloud.

'What?'

'I don't care. Please. Just get me out of here. I don't care about TARDISes and am'ranths. I don't want to have to care.

Just get me out.'

'Daniel –'

' *Stop* it!' His hands twitched. Instinct telling him to cover his ears. 'It's none of my business. I don't want any of this shit, all right? I want to leave this town. I want you to get me out.'

Forrester paused. Then sighed. Then nodded. 'OK,' she said. 'I've got what I came for. Time we got after the Doctor.'

She turned and walked back through the darkness of the entrance, away from the impossible room, away from the heart of Hell. Daniel followed. Christ, yes. Followed fast.

Monroe was standing by a building that might as well have been made of sticks for all the protection it offered from the elements. He was talking to a Negro man, talking in the kind of language you usually reserved for children and other such sodding nuisances. The Negro must have been about twenty, his clothes so worn and thin that he looked almost naked as the rain flattened the fabric against his body.

'You understand?' Monroe gargled, poking a thick finger into the Negro's chest. 'Ca-co-pho-ny. Diabolists.'

The Negro shook his head, said something in a language that might have been English. His accent was too thick for Erskine to make out the words.

'Witch-doctors,' Monroe tried. 'Unga-bunga men. Yes?'

Erskine looked around the street, not knowing what to say.

Negroes and riff-raff peered out from the doorways and the broken windows of the decaying buildings, some afraid, some just alert. They were watching him, by Jesus Christ and his little brown beard, he was sure of it.

Thankfully, they couldn't see his face under the mask.

The Negro man shook his head again, and tried to push Monroe's hand away. Monroe reacted badly, looked as if he was going to hit the man. Erskine averted his gaze. Around him, Renewalists and other 'concerned citizens' were marching in and out of the houses, while other townsfolk lurked in the shadows, watching the scene but afraid to enter the 'African quarter' even now. Some of the Negroes were complaining, screaming unfathomable curses. Some were even barricading the doors. It didn't help. The doors were pushed open, forced open, broken open.

'Where are they?' Monroe was demanding. Out of the corner of his eye, Erskine saw two townsfolk grab the Negro's arms. 'The witch-folk, yes? Where? Here?'

'In the name of Reason,' somebody shouted, and another door was broken down. The Negro man was being punched in the stomach, once, twice, three times. Erskine didn't know who was doing the punching.

And suddenly, a dark-skinned shape was speeding towards him. Erskine panicked, some deep-rooted instinct telling him that he was under attack from the hordes of Satan, and –

without even thinking – he reached out and grabbed at the shape, wrapping his thick arms around the skinny black body.

It was a boy, a Negro boy, maybe seventeen or eighteen. The boy shouted something indecipherable, struggled, and turned.

His eyes met Erskine's.

No. His eyes looked into the slits in Erskine's mask.

His eyes were full of chaos.

Then he was struggling again. Kicking. Biting. Erskine howled, an exclamation that burst out of his lungs without the hindrance of

words. ‘In the name of Reason,’ somebody shouted again, and Erskine began clubbing the boy in the face, wildly swinging his arms until he heard something crack. As the boy fell, he felt a curious relaxing sensation spread through his body. This was easy. Damnation, this made sense. This he could deal with, at least.

Catcher closed his eyes, felt the lids lock shut. Cogs and wheels were moving in the pink darkness.

‘That’s right,’ the prisoner was saying. ‘Close your eyes.

When you open them, look for Reason. It won’t be there, Mr Catcher. I promise you.’

Impossible. That was impossible. Catcher was about to say so, but his head was full of fantasies about worlds whose inhabitants Reasoned themselves out of existence, and he thought he saw the voice of a woman, hiding behind the clockwork, laughing at him. How could you see a voice?

Irrational. Unreasonable.

Everything had gone quiet, but he could still hear the diabolist’s voice. Look for Reason, Mr Catcher... it won’t be there... Catcher tried to summon a snort of contempt, but none would come. Why, he’d open his eyes, and everything would be the same, stable and sound, under the spell of Reason...

He opened his eyes. The meeting hall was indeed unchanged, every corner where it should be, every surface in its proper place. Astonishingly, it took Catcher some time to notice that the prisoner had vanished. The chair was still in the middle of the hall, but the rope that had bound the man lay neatly coiled on top of the seat. Catcher spun, eyes searching the room. The heavy doors were closed. If they’d been opened, he would have heard. He looked behind the pillars, sure that the man must be there, hiding. He wasn’t. A spring snapped inside his head.

There was a grating sound. The doors opened, and four figures – the councillors – congregated in the doorway.

‘There is a rational explanation,’ Catcher told them, calmly.

At least, he thought *he* sounded calm.

Mr Wolcott just cleared his throat. ‘Mr Catcher, we feel that something

needs to be said. Your Renewal Society –'

He broke off, noticing the empty chair in the middle of the hall. Four pairs of eyes floated in Catcher's direction.

'A rational explanation,' said Catcher, and his voice was louder than he'd expected it to be. He pointed at the chair. 'An agent of Cacophony. Fairy-stories about other worlds.

Distractions.'

'Erm?' said Mr Wolcott.

'Rational. Our course is clear.' Catcher was nodding, his head bobbing up and down spastically. 'He must be found. He must be executed. Burned at the stake.'

There was a shocked silence from the council.

'I am in control!' insisted Catcher. 'Do not suggest that I am in any way behaving irrationally.'

But they were just staring at him, not knowing what to say.

Four confused and alarmed people stood aside as Catcher stormed out of the hall with awkward, mechanical steps.

Half a wardrobe floated past, spewing out tartan jackets and brightly coloured greatcoats that looked like they'd been made for gigantic toy soldiers. Duquesne sat on the edge of an overturned bookcase, which rested on a section of flooring that drifted aimlessly on a sea of darkness. There was still a ceiling overhead, but the cracks were visible even in that.

She didn't want to be here. She didn't want to be within a million miles of this terrible place. Pushed in one direction by the Shadow Directory, pulled in another by the candle-flames that flickered up and down her spine, spirited across the world by politics and lightning-gods... did everybody live this way, she wondered, or were there people who could actually choose the kind of world they lived in?

'OK, how about psychometry? Can you do that?'

Christopher Cwej sat on a nearby mound of dictionaries, with one of the books open in his hands. He was flipping through words beginning with 'psy' to see what kind of 'cool psychic powers' Duquesne had. She

wasn't familiar with any of the words, and kept telling him so.

'Psychometry is where you touch something and know who touched it last,' Cwej explained. 'Like fingerprints, I suppose.

Back at the Academy, they said that some primitive planets had judicial systems based on psychometry. They said it was all a load of bull. But I think they might have had a kind of grudge against psychics. Oh well.'

'Do you know where we're going?' Duquesne asked, looking down as another crack appeared in their island.

'Er. We're floating the right way, I'm sure. OK, what about psychokinesis? That's a good one.'

Duquesne shot him a dark glance. She was trying to keep on good terms with him, but he was starting to irritate her. If he keeps this up, she thought, I'll have to do my job.

The idea made her grimace. I do not wish to be like a *chirurgeon*, she thought. I do not wish to put my faith in the killing lessons. I do not wish to let the Directory steal my soul away.

'What about the secret passage?' she asked, trying to distract herself.

'Oh. That.' Cwej shut the dictionary. 'I don't know. The Doctor said once that every good library should have a secret passage. It's kind of traditional. I suppose there must be one in the TARDIS library. I suppose that's what Interface meant.'

Duquesne still wasn't sure who this interface was, but she pressed on. 'And you don't know where in the library to look for it, I take it?'

'No. And if I did, we probably couldn't get to it.' He indicated the other islands floating alongside them with a wave of his hand, inadvertently throwing the dictionary over the edge and into the darkness. Duquesne was sure she heard mechanical jaws start chewing on it down below. 'And even if we could find it and get to it, we don't know if it'd still lead anywhere. That's the trouble with all this multi-dimensional transcendental stuff –'

He broke off.

'Is something wrong?' Duquesne asked, patiently.

‘Can I just take this opportunity to say something?’ Cwej grinned. ‘I’m *still* brilliant. Think about it for a second.

Suppose you’re a Time Lord. Suppose you can build things like TARDISes, right? And you’ve got a library. Where d’you put the secret passage?’

Duquesne sighed. ‘Not knowing what a "Time Lord" is, Christopher, I couldn’t say.’

‘Pick a book.’

‘Pardon me?’

‘Go on. Shut your eyes. Reach into that stack of books over there, pick one out at random. It’s just a hunch, all right?’

Anything to keep him happy, Duquesne thought. She did as he said, letting her fingers find a large but surprisingly light novel which bore the title *A Passage to India*. She thought she felt her fingertips prickle slightly as she touched the cover.

‘Open it,’ Cwej beamed. Duquesne shrugged, opened the book, looked down at the first page.

Except that there was no page. There was just a space, a hole that seemed to stretch into infinity. A tunnel.

Alarmed, she studied the edges of the book. On the outside, it seemed perfectly normal. But on the inside...

‘Where in his library would a Time Lord put a secret passage?’ said Cwej. ‘Answer: in one of the books.’

Duquesne just stared at him. Cwej stood, walked over to her, indicated the book.

‘After you,’ he said, politely.

The island was empty. It had carried two people, but now they were gone, leaving only an untidy pile of reference books and second-hand paperbacks.

Satisfied, the force that held the TARDIS together released its grip on the island. The cracks blossomed across it, until there was nothing left of the platform but a hundred marble shards that fell away into the darkness.

There was the sound of splintering wood. Wet scraps of fabric, some painted with stars and moon-signs, drifted past on the night breeze. From the crowd, there wasn't so much as a shout; just a murmur, like the roar of the sea. White noise.

'Sheol,' whispered Roz.

She and Daniel were hiding behind the corner of the town records office. Or, rather, *she* was hiding. Daniel was just standing behind her, tugging at her sleeve.

'Come on,' he said. 'Not this way.'

'What's happening?'

'I don't know. Come on. They're going to notice you.'

Notice *me*, Roz thought. Not us. Thanks, partner. She pointed towards a part of the street where a tent had once stood. 'See that? I used to work there. If you can call it work.

Looks like somebody's got a grudge against fortune-tellers.

Probably someone I gave a bad reading to.'

She watched the people tearing down the remaining stalls.

They'd started by venting their anger on those attractions that seemed 'philosophically corrupt', the conjurers and the ersatz gypsies. Now they were attacking anything they could see.

Twenty feet away, a man in a colourful waistcoat was being pinned to the ground and repeatedly kicked by four serious-looking middle-aged men who'd probably been accountants or clerks or something earlier in the day.

Then she saw the man in the hood. He stood at the very heart of the crowd, waving his arms like a conductor, determined that if this madness was going to become a riot, it was going to be a damned well-ordered riot. He was short but muscular, his entire head obscured by grey sackcloth. Roz narrowed her eyes. The behaviour of the townsfolk was odd enough, but this one looked downright weird.

She stared into the twin slits of his eyes, and suddenly realized that he was staring back.

Slowly, carefully, he raised his hand. A pointed finger.

Daniel stopped tugging at her sleeve. Roz turned, started to run, and saw that he was already running. The adrenalin burst triggered off a memory, and she saw herself tearing across a desert full of shadows... but there were worse and angrier things in the universe, she reminded herself, than gynoids.

As if to prove the point, something hard and heavy promptly cracked against her neck. There were peculiar pink-and-orange lights exploding inside her head as she fell to the ground.

'He's mad,' said Mr Wolcott. 'I always said he was a bit on the peculiar side.'

'When did you say that?' inquired Mr Van DeVanter.

'Oh, I don't know. Always. He tried to force me to read this scientific paper he'd written, once. About how you could build a machine to travel through time using mirrors and electricity.

Said he was a century ahead of his time. I mean to say...

Isaac Penley's eyes danced nervously around the hall. The other three had forgotten about him again. He considered leaping to Mr Catcher's defence, then remembered that if he'd been able to defend anyone properly, he'd still be practising law and probably an awful lot richer.

'If I *might* bring this meeting to *or* der?' trilled Mrs Wilson.

Mrs Wilson had no official position on the council, but her husband seemed to be perpetually sick (and so would I be, Mr Wolcott had once said, if I'd married her), and she never missed the chance to stand in for him. Her seemingly permanent position on the council was acknowledged by most of Woodwicke, though Mr Catcher always seemed to treat her with suspicion. Perhaps she was a diabolist, Isaac thought. In disguise. ' *Thank* you, gentlemen. If we *could* discuss the *quest* ion of what *ac* tion we should take at this *difficult* time...

Isaac felt himself deflate. He'd trusted Catcher, hadn't he?

'What's to discuss?' asked Wolcott. 'We've made a total balls-up of the whole situation. Old Silkwood's had his head dented by some idiot flinging rocks about. Half of the watchmen don't want anything to do with the situation, and the other half are siding with the troublemakers. If they are troublemakers. For all we know, the town might honestly be under siege from Satanists, and the rioters might be the only ones saving our immortal souls from the oncoming darkness.'

He shrugged.

‘You never know,’ he concluded.

‘So, what do we do now?’ asked Mr Van DeVanter.

What do we do now? The dread question. Isaac glanced at the door. He could easily slip out of the hall, run after Mr Catcher. I mean, yes, he’d seemed a little upset when the diabolist had vanished...

‘We could call in the militia,’ suggested Mr Wolcott.

... but he had a right to be, surely? Besides, at least the man seemed to have some idea of what was going on. Unlike the council.

‘ *Gentle* men,’ cut in Mrs Wilson. ‘If we *could* remember that this is a *democratic* council. If we *could* have suggestions in an *order* ly manner, then the *four* of us can *vote* on the outcome...

She looked along the table, noticing the empty seat at the end.

‘The *three* of us,’ she said. ‘The *three* of us can vote on the outcome.’

There was a light at the end of the tunnel. It was a very attractive light, covered in an elaborate paper shade that had been hand-painted with a scene of oriental gods hunting huge wild cats. Marielle Duquesne blinked. The room was much like any other she’d seen in this TARDIS complex, though the roundels in the walls were fashioned from brass instead of marble or wood, and there was the scent of incense in the air.

It reminded her of the ashrams of India, or of the temples she’d visited when the Directory had sent her to Egypt to investigate the Amarna Graffito. The floor was unfurnished and tiled with copper plates, but the walls were lined with stacks of childhood leftovers that touched the ceiling, heaps of model boats and rag dolls and broken toy drums Behind her, Cwej tumbled out of the tunnel. Stray books with titles like *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Black Orchid 2; This Time It’s Personal* flapped down the passage behind him and landed in an untidy pile.

‘Talk about getting lost in a good book;’ he said, annoyingly.

‘Where are we?’ Duquesne asked.

Cwej looked around, sniffing the air. His attention was caught by a large bottle, mounted on a stand in one corner.

There were shapes moving inside the glass.

‘Oh, wow,’ said Cwej. ‘Look, it’s a little universe in a bottle. You can see all the tiny people.’

‘Christopher!’

‘Hey, that one’s got a TARDIS just like the Doctor’s.

Maybe it *is* the Doctor. I wonder what he’s doing in San Francisco?’ He looked up from the bottle, but his gaze didn’t focus on Duquesne. ‘Oh. Hello, Interface.’

Duquesne spun round to follow his gaze. In the far wall, one of the roundels had opened up, revealing a huge and bloodshot eye. Then another opened, and another, and another.

Eyes. Ears. Mouths, both horizontal and vertical.

‘Help me,’ said Interface, with a dozen sick voices. ‘Help.

Personality. Please. Invaded. TARDIS.’

Cwej looked concerned. ‘What is it? What’s wrong?’

‘TARDIS. Big. Too. Personality. Invaded.’

‘The TARDIS has had its personality invaded?’ Cwej guessed.

‘No. My. Personality. My personality. Invaded. TARDIS.’

‘The TARDIS has invaded *your*...?’ Cwej’s eyes opened wide. ‘I don’t understand. What should we do?’ We, noted Duquesne. Good. He was starting to trust her, then.

‘It. It. It. Communicating. With you. Talk. Don’t trust.

Don’t trust. Talking to. Trying to. To talk to you. The TARDIS. Is. It is.’

‘The TARDIS is trying to... no. You said it couldn’t do that. You said it’d be like talking to New Birmingham or something.’

‘ *Talk*,’ squealed the interface, and something rippled through the room again. Duquesne gasped. The burning wasn’t just in her back now, it had torn through her nervous system and shot straight to the top of her spine, opening up like a flower inside her head. As the ripple touched the walls, the mouths were sealed shut, the eyes

imploded violently, and the ears collapsed in on themselves.

Then it was over. Duquesne shot a glance at Cwej, but he didn't look back at her. His jaw was hanging open, and his eyes were glazed over with memories.

The slits were staring down at her, and Roz could see a water-grey pair of eyes on the other side of the sackcloth. There were hands around her throat. Her back was flat against the road, and something hard and bony was pressing down on her chest, stopping her from moving.

She suddenly remembered that she wasn't breathing, and was disappointed that she couldn't scream.

' *Io Ordo Io Io*,' the hooded executioner was muttering.

Like an exorcism in binary. Forcing the life out of Roslyn Inyathi Forrester, the witch-woman of Woodwicke. All sounds became one sound, all sensations became one sensation. The man's chanting. The roar of the crowd. Everything was fire.

Everything was the colour of flame.

*She was in a cave. In a cave on a planet of fire. There was a machine with her, a robot, but its silver skin was as delicate as porcelain and it changed its shape at will. Its voice was cultured and it spoke fluent English.*

*'This is how it ends for us all,' the robot said, mournfully.*

*'Lost. Abandoned. Far from home. Exiled from our own times and cut off from the TARDIS.'*

Roz wanted to speak, to tell it that she wasn't going to die, but in some other world a man was throttling her and she couldn't find the breath.

*'He shot me,' the machine continued, its body bathing in the bright orange fire. 'At point-blank range. Not that the range makes much difference, of course. A mercy killing, he would have said. Certainly, he felt less guilt about me than he did about his human companions. But then, we machines have no souls. And what are ghosts, but manifestations of guilt? We make terrible ghosts.'*

*Then it began to shrink, its precious silver body folding in on itself until it was no bigger than a child's doll.*

*‘This is how it ends for us all,’ it said, in a high-pitched and squeaky voice. ‘Now the last surviving part of me is invaded.*

*Help me. Help. Personality. TARDIS. Don’t trust her. Don’t trust her, Cwej.’*

New sounds pushed their way up out of the fire. The syllables became real again.

‘ *Ordo Ordo Io Ordo*,’ said the man. There was no longer any pain in Roz’s neck. There was no room inside her for pain any more. She’d forgotten what breathing was like. The flames tried to drag her back under, and she knew she couldn’t stop them.

Just as she was about to die, everything changed.

A heavy shape fell on top of her, then rolled aside. The hooded man had dropped to the ground, sticky half-words bubbling up in his mouth. Air rushed back into Roz’s lungs.

Her neck started to ache again.

She looked up. Daniel Tremayne was standing over her, a rock in his hands, a vacant expression on his face. Roz turned her head, and it hurt like Sheol. The hooded man lay on the ground next to her, a dent in the back of the cowl, a dent that ran right through the fabric and into his skull. She couldn’t tell whether he was alive or dead.

‘He was going to kill you,’ said Daniel.

Roz forced herself to her feet. The other rioters were all around them, but most were caught up in struggles of their own. As she stood, eyes began to turn in her direction.

Somebody shouted something about a lynching.

‘I saved you,’ Daniel said, and he didn’t sound pleased with himself, not in the slightest. He looked down at the rock in his hand, his face utterly blank. Roz watched him drop it by the motionless form of the hooded man, and knew exactly what he was thinking.

Daniel Tremayne, getting himself mixed up in someone else’s fight. Getting himself involved, in the most violent way imaginable.

Now the crowd was closing in, shouts turning to war cries.

This time, it was Roz who pulled at Daniel’s sleeve, tugging him away

down the first side-street she saw.

‘I’m damned,’ she heard him say as they ran. ‘I’ll never get out now. I’m *damned*.’

**7**

**The Edge of Distraction**

A man in a grey mask was standing on the corner of Burr Street, demanding answers from Beth-Ann Wolcott, the councillor’s daughter. The man was determined to find out why she’d never married. There was something deeply suspicious about that, apparently, especially at her age. The door of the Wolcott house was open, and there were other masked men inside, peering under the beds and pulling up the floorboards.

None of the men were members of the Renewal Society.

They were just ‘concerned citizens’. Half an hour earlier, the sackcloth of their masks had been used for storing potatoes.

As the rationalists moved from street to street in search of

‘evidence’, the rumours spread in a manner that was almost viral. More children had been butchered, it was said, though no one seemed to be able to name the children that had died. A shrine to Baalzebub had been located in the ramshackle home of a Spanish family, but nobody was sure how the place had been identified as a shrine to Baalzebub. A woman living in Eastern Walk had been unmasked as an anarchist witch –

again, the method of detection seemed unclear – and was now awaiting trial by the Renewalists.

Twenty-five minutes after the church bell had tolled eleven, a man named Samuel Lincoln took shelter in the doorway of a grocery store in Paris Street and, seeing the smoke rising from the ‘African quarter’ of town, made disparaging comments about the behaviour of his fellow townspeople. A local priest, a wiry and wide-eyed man by the name of Hatchard, took him to task and insisted that ‘the flock of Satan must be purged’.

An argument ensued, with Samuel Lincoln calling the priest a

‘fanatical buffoon’ and the priest calling Samuel Lincoln a

‘mollycoddler of the Beast’. The dispute ended when Hatchard hit his opponent in the face with an empty whiskey bottle.

Within minutes the grocery store was surrounded by other citizens, including masked representatives of the Renewal Society. The dispute escalated.

Evidently, the Age of Reason was in full swing.

The night was full of crawling, blasphemous things. They hid behind the trees and the bushes all along Hazelrow Avenue, watching Catcher walk back towards the house, ticking in the greenery, reminding him of his mistakes. He’d let the man in the irrational white suit trick him. The Watchmakers resented that. If they hadn’t been such Reasonable beings, Catcher would have thought they were jealous.

FOR ARE WE NOT THE WATCHMAKERS? they were saying. ARE WE NOT THE GREAT ARCHITECTS? DID

WE NOT MAP OUT EVERY INCH OF THE COSMOS,

AEONS BEFORE MAN EVEN CHARTERED HIS OWN

DOMAIN? TO US, ALL OF SPACE – ALL OF TIME – IS

NOTHING MORE THAN A CLOCKWORK, AND WE ARE

THE ONES THAT HOLD THE WATCH-HANDLE.

REMEMBER WHAT WE TAUGHT YOU, BOY.

Yes. Catcher remembered tearing through the halls of the family home, being pinned to the floor by his parents, being carried away on the back of a cart. His family had paid the surgeons to lock him in a little grey room, where they'd watched him and fed him and scrubbed him and stuck instruments into him. It had been meant as a punishment, he'd been sure, but it had felt more like a BE VERY CAREFUL

AS 'REVELATION' IS NOT A SCIENTIFIC TERM more like something he couldn't really name.

Because the little grey room had been perfect in every way.

Eight corners, four walls, straight lines, hardly any furnishings. The room only changed its nature when the sun rose or fell, but even the shadows had a mechanical precision to them. Catcher remembered staring at a blank grey ceiling, hour after hour and day after day. Watching the shadows stretch and shrink in the corner above the bed, until the corner had finally unfolded and the Watchmakers had revealed themselves to him in full for the first time.

Their messenger was there, in the corner of the room and in the angles of his head. The Majestic Clockwork Machine-age Hermes. The clockwork began to turn, and he knew his Reason, and his Reason was to remake the world IN OUR

IMAGE.

Months later, the surgeons had tried to take him out of the room and carry him back to the family home. He remembered trying to dig his nails into the floor of the grey room. Trying to dig his way into the structure. AND? And to stay there.

Matheson Catcher reached the far end of Hazelrow Avenue and found himself staring up at his house. A less rational mind, he told himself,

would have seen no pattern or logic in the shape of the building. But he could see it. He could see the workings of the machine. OH YES.

'You're not going anywhere, vermin!'

Adjudicator Volsted Kornbluth Cwej – or, as young Christopher called him, Dad – was a giant of a man, and when Christopher looked up at him, he seemed to stretch all the way to the Luna Sierra. His jaw was firm, his teeth clenched, a look of absolute determination etched across his proud and chiselled face.

'He's gotta be a cop! Waste 'im!'

On the far side of the Overcity Four Shoptronic Mezzanine, two figures scurried away from the bank, weapons glinting in the afternoon sunlight. The bank was easily recognizable from the large sign marked 'BANK' that hung above it. The bank robbers were easily recognizable from their pug-ugly faces, their (illegal) snub-nosed plasmode blasters, and their working-class accents.

Young Christopher gasped as the plasmode shots rang out across the mezzanine, but they *spittanged* harmlessly off the plastic body-armour that Dad wore even when taking his family out shopping.

'But, Dad! They're getting away!'

Volsted Cwej looked down into his son's wide and trusting eyes, then noticed the red plastic robo-frisbee in the boy's hands.

'Not to worry, son. Here, let me borrow that.' He took the frisbee in his strong and experienced hands, weighed it up for a moment, then hurled it across the mezzanine.

*Whumf!* went the frisbee as it thumped the first robber's head, knocking him senseless. *Fwang!* it went as it rebounded off the man's skull, spinning into the legs of the second thug.

*Oopf!* he went as he fell onto the mezzacrete, and his gun clattered harmlessly out of his reach.

'Curses!' exclaimed the robber. 'Foiled again!'

The robo-frisbee zinged back into the old Adjudicator's hands. With a grin, he passed it back to his son.

'Gee, Dad,' said young Christopher. 'I wish I could be like you.'

Volsted Cwej laughed affectionately. It was one of those great family moments. ‘You will be one day, son. Why, there’s been a Cwej in the Oberon Lodge of the Adjudication Service since, oh, I-don’t-know-when. Yes, my boy, law and order is certainly in our blood.’

*Flash of light. Glint of the present. Tumbling memories.*

‘Here,’ said a voice with a strong Spaceport Seven Overcity accent. No, not Overcity Seven. French. ‘In the corner. Look.’

Chris shook his head, made a ‘bwwwllllwwwllww’ noise with the spare air in his cheeks. Marielle Duquesne was crouched in the corner of the room with the brass roundels.

The room was back to normal, and none of Interface’s manifold eyes were present.

‘Christopher?’

‘Er, right. Sorry. Just had a memory.’

‘A…?’

‘A memory. Like there was something important I’d forgotten. Er. What is it?’ Chris joined her in the corner. The wall there was scratched and chipped, as if something large and savage had tried to take a bite out of it. Chris squinted.

There in the wall was a hole, only a little larger than the rest of the indentations. With a start, he realized that it was a tiny mouth.

‘Cwej,’ it squeaked. ‘ *Cwej*.’

‘Interface?’ He sounded more concerned than he’d meant to.

‘Cwej. Please. Listen. Have been to. The heart. Heart of the ship. Trying to get me. Out. Out of the way.’ It made an unpleasant squelching noise that sounded like a multi-dimensional cough. ‘The dark. Dark. Monsters. In the dark.’

Chris knelt down by the side of the mouth. ‘Do you know what’s causing it?’

The lips let out another cough. Longer, this time, more rasping. Chris had seen simcords of human soldiers dying of metacarcinogens that ate away the lungs, and their death–

rattles weren't nearly as bad. 'Someone. Listen. Please.

Someone on Earth. Using the. The chaos. To remake the world.'

Interface's voice had changed, Chris noted. Despite the fractured sentences, there was a pleading quality to it that seemed almost human. 'Someone on Earth? You mean a human being's doing all this?'

'Hu. Human. But. Somebody. Somebody else controlling.

Controlling him Very old. Very old. Mani. Mani. Manip.'

'Manipulating him?' Chris was nodding like a mad thing, trying to remember all the details. 'Like some evil meta-dimensional force or something? Like an old enemy of the Doctor's?'

Marielle was looking at him strangely again.

'Nnnn. No. Old. Older. Than Doctor.'

'Who? Who's responsible?' demanded Chris.

'Ca,' said Interface.

'Ca,' it tried again.

' *Ca*,' it screeched.

Then the corner turned to dust, the mouth's lips disintegrating, white marble flecks cascading down the wall.

'Damn,' said Chris.

Marielle looked irritated. She was almost cute like that.

'Did that mean anything to you?' she asked.

'Not a lot. We've got some clues, but we still don't know what's happening to the ship.' Chris shrugged, and stood.

'Still, it's better than a poke in the eye with a sharp stick.'

Marielle looked blank.

'It's an expression,' Chris explained.

'Oh,' said Marielle.

‘Of course, this is all my fault,’ the man in the white suit said cheerily.

Beth-Ann Wolcott hardly knew what to say. ‘Really?’

‘Oh, yes. Of course, blame is as relative as time itself. You could say that the creator of the universe was at fault for starting off the whole process. However, the creator of the universe never really understood the concept of responsibility, and seldom acknowledges complaints.’ He twiddled his walking-cane thoughtfully.

‘I see.’

‘Consequences. You never know what you’ve started.’ He looked out of the alleyway, watched the masked men run past on Paris Street. ‘It’s the bloodlines that worry me the most. I may have affected my companions more deeply than I like to admit. Genetically. Bernice’s children will be born with a little piece of Time Lord in them.’

He smiled sheepishly. ‘Not that you should take that too literally, of course.’

‘Well, no. Of course not.’

‘Timothy Dean would have introduced almost unthinkable quantities of Time Lord DNA to the human species.

Christopher must have planted several family trees by now.

Ancelyn may have spread innate abilities throughout mankind that aren’t even supposed to be possible in this universe. And then there was Jo. Poor Jo. I sometimes wonder if her dynasty ever... well, too late to worry now. Eleven-thirty already. Half an hour until Christmas Day, and we can all open our presents.’ He straightened his jacket, slung the cane over his shoulder, and stepped out into the rain. ‘Things to do.

Amaranths to locate. People to see about dogs.’

‘Wait!’ Beth-Ann Wolcott called.

The man stopped, turned, and gave her a quizzical look.

‘You just saved my life,’ she said.

‘Yes. They were going to burn you as a witch, you know.

That’s rationalism for you. Sometimes, even I don’t feel ready for life

on this planet.' He licked a finger, held it up, thought for a moment.

'This way, I think,' he said. And then he was gone.

The basement could almost have been alive. Stepping into it, there was an unaccountable feeling of familiarity, as if Catcher had been in a place like this before; a room where the walls seemed to expand and contract as if they were breathing, where the passages were filled with strange and hateful organic sounds. Even the dais looked more like a growth than a construction, something sick and fungal and cankerous.

And the Watchmakers were there, lurking in the labyrinth, waiting for him. IS THIS WHAT YOU CALL REASON? No, it isn't; I didn't do this. ARE YOU SUPPOSED TO BE IN

CONTROL? Yes, yes, I am in control, of course I am. The nausea grew worse as he crossed the room, stepping over the bumps and the pools that were spreading across the floor, DON'T TREAD ON THE CRACKS OR THE BEARS WILL

GET YOU HA HA, but wherever he looked the place was CONTAIN IT coming apart, there was nothing but raw chaos flowering I HATE FLOWERS and it was just like the jungle THE GARDEN the garden all over again.

He might have been there for hours, and he might have been screaming, or crying, or just forgetting to blink on time.

He might have done any number of things before he noticed that the sphere was missing. He might have, but it was impossible to say; his memory was no longer the shape he thought it should be. The gift, the Watchmakers' gift, OUR

GIFT, was gone, removed from the crystal column at the heart of the dais, and the screen was on fire, and pictures were running down it like melted wax. An image, taken from the basement's memory. A woman – the diabolist woman –

standing here, in his very own home, IN OUR TEMPLE, stealing the sphere...

She had come. For him. That was why she was here in Woodwicke, obviously. To destroy his work, OUR WORK, and take away his Reason.

And the next thing he knew he was running through his labyrinth,

along passages that turned in circles and ate their own tails, until, finally, he was in a room that hiccuped and giggled. A store-room, Catcher was sure, although he no longer recognized its shape. Reaching into a melted trunk that seemed to swallow his arms up to the elbows.

He felt something solid in the trunk. Cold, stable, metallic.

The weapon was still there, where he'd found it on the day the labyrinth had been created, when he'd tried mapping out every inch of the cellar and the sheer size of it had done strange BUT ENTIRELY REASONABLE things to the insides of his head.

He pulled his hands out of the trunk with an almighty *squidge*, grasping the object of his affections in both hands and pressing it against his ticking heart. Now he was ready. At last, the final battle against Cacophony could begin.

There was a large pile of wood on the corner of Eastern Walk.

Isaac Penley didn't stop to see where the wood had come from, but he suspected the worst. He remembered the stories he'd heard from France when they'd had their Revolution, about the barricades they'd built across their roads; scraps of furniture, old carriages, even parts of houses, tipped out onto the streets. He imagined the same thing happening here in Woodwicke. Or worse. The homes of the diabolists looted, the contents carried out onto the roads and burned.

Did 'contents' include the occupants? And how many diabolists were there in the town, anyway? If what Mr Catcher said was true, there had to be dozens. Isaac tried to guess which of the people he knew might be the guilty ones, but no names sprang to mind.

Two of the Renewalists – Isaac didn't recognize them, not in their hoods – were climbing the woodpile. Right up on top of the heap, something was burning, blue flames hissing in the rain. Isaac looked away, and tried to slide into the shadows on the other side of the road, so as not to be noticed by the masked men. He wasn't sure why he did that. Wasn't he a member of the Society? Wasn't he supposed to be on *their* side?

When he finally arrived at Catcher's house, the basement door was ajar, and Isaac concluded that the house had been left in a hurry. He shivered (though that was as much to do with the rain as anything), finally deciding not to enter. Mr Catcher was obviously not at home. But where else might he be?

‘Hold on.’

‘Where are you? What happened to the room?’

‘It went. The TARDIS is finished. Hold on. My hand.

There!’

‘I can’t feel you. Christopher?’

‘I’m holding on –’

‘Christopher, that isn’t me!’

‘What? Oh, Sheol, I can’t believe I just touched that. Uck.

Marielle, look. Look up. Can you see the chest of drawers?

Can you see me?’

‘No. The clockwork things... oh, Christopher, they’re laughing. I can hear them laughing.’

‘Marielle, can you see the drawers? Look, up here. Nice drawers. Nineteenth century, I think. Uh. Sorry. Ahhh!’

‘Christopher? Christopher!’

‘Marielle, listen. If you see any holes...’

‘Holes? But there’s just the dark –’

‘Yeah. Holes in the dark. Don’t go near them, Marielle. I think... I think they’re holes into the vortex. Look, don’t ask about the vortex, okay?’

‘I can hear them. Oh, Christopher... there are so many of them, on the other side of the holes. There’s a mind... *Dieu*, it’s so big, but it’s shut into a cube...

‘Marielle! Ignore them! Just ignore them!’

‘There are so many. Some of them are singing. Singing in the... vortex? Yes. And there’s a man. Spread out through time. He says he was tricked. And there’s something like a worm, or a snake. Creatures... planets... trapped in loops of time. And there are ships. Ships, lost in the vortex. Christopher

_’

‘Ignore them! Marielle, don’t go near the holes. Shit, the drawers just fell apart.’

‘The clockwork things… they’re falling apart as well…’

‘What?’

‘Falling apart… cogs and gearsprings… everything is…

apart…

‘Marielle? I’m trying to reach you. Hang on, Marielle.’

‘Marielle?’

‘ *Marielle?* ’

The King George public house made Daniel Tremayne think of a butcher’s store. The roof of the building had been torn open across its length, the edges made jagged by the splintered wooden beams that had once arced smoothly overhead. It was like looking out through the ribcage of an animal carcass.

The pub had been murdered by the Revolution.

No wonder it made Daniel think of a butcher’s store.

Forrester was standing by a hole in the wall that must once have been the doorway, watching the muddy thoroughfare outside, stepping away from the gap whenever anyone passed by. ‘The Doctor could be half-way across history by now,’ she muttered.

Daniel didn’t even bother to shrug. He just sank further back into the corner, scraping his backside on a sharp fragment of rubble.

‘Two-to-one we’ll end up having to clean up the mess ourselves. Well, that’s my life for you. Wiping the sick off the furniture on a cosmic scale ‘ There was a roar of triumph from a street nearby, and Forrester squinted through the rain to try to make out what was going on. ‘This shouldn’t be happening, Danny-boy. It’s a disruption. An anomaly. And I hate anomalies, especially when I’m partially responsible for them.

This place offends my instinct for law enforcement.’

And under her breath, she added, ‘What’s left of it.’

Daniel just grunted. Forrester turned to him. ‘You’ve gone quiet all of a sudden. Aren’t you going to ask me when you can get out of here? You haven’t shut up about it all night.’

‘Doesn’t matter. Doesn’t make any difference. Too late now.’

‘Because you got involved?’ Forrester scowled. ‘You’re sorry you saved my life, is that it? Thanks, Dan. Thanks a lot.’

Another grunt. Daniel couldn’t think of any other answer.

He saw himself picking up the rock on Eastern Walk, lifting it over the hooded man’s head, seeing the blood drained out of Forrester’s face, bringing the rock down. He thought of the story of Cain and Abel. The whole course of human history, changed by a rock. *What kind of world is this, that’s made out of pebbles?*

Then there was a low chiming, like the echo you hear after the ringing of a church bell. Forrester was reaching into the pouch that had been stitched into her shawl, the thin material stuck to the shiny suit underneath by the rain. The sphere she’d taken from Catcher’s place was in her hands.

The sphere was spinning. Very gently, very slowly, whistling as it turned. Daniel saw surprise on Forrester’s face.

‘What now?’ she growled.

He knew the layout of the King George well enough. The crack in the western wall had been just big enough for him to slip through, though he’d had to duck as he’d moved along the narrow passage inside, where the structure had collapsed in on itself and created a cramped alleyway of stone debris and shattered timbers, with the Watchmakers shouting CLEAN IT

UP! CLEAN IT ALL UP! whenever he passed a pile of rubble or a misplaced beam. Now he was by the arch that led into the saloon area, the rain going *pitter-pat-pitter-patter-pat* in obscene random formations on the roof, NOTHING IS

RANDOM AND NOTHING IS LEFT TO ACCIDENT, the left side of his head arguing with the right side, SHE IS AN

AGENT OF CACOPHONY AND YOU KNOW IT, rain

forming words, OH the glory, grammatic order out of nature's chaos, and THESE ARE OUR WORDS and PICK IT UP!

PICK UP THE BROKEN RAILING! walking with a *clank-clankity-clank* like the *pitter-patter-pat.* KILL HER. Remove her. REMOVE HER. IT IS NOT KILLING if you remove an agent of Cacophony REMOVING CHAOS FROM THE

UNIVERSE ignore the sayings and the superstitions of the witch-women.

She would simply have to UNDERSTAND THAT SHE

HAD TO BE REMOVED in the name of Reason IN THE

NAME OF REASON but obviously, she wouldn't understand.

Women simply DO NOT do not have minds capable of understanding RATIONALIST PHILOSOPHY which is why witches are witches and therefore must be burned.

REMOVED. Removed.

He held the weapon against his chest, clinging to it, cherishing it. The Watchmakers would lead him to the witch, and everything would be returned to its usual order. CLEAN

IT UP! CLEAN EVERYTHING UP!

Paris Street was busier than it had ever been in the whole of its seventy-year history. An argument had become a dispute, a dispute had become a fight, a fight had become a made, and a mêlée had become a riot. All part of the natural process, thought the Doctor, stopping in front of a spot where a man's head had been cracked against the ground until the road had been sprayed pink. From nought to apocalypse in under fifteen minutes. He cleared his throat. How many people? Two dozen? Three? A quick word or two should be enough to quieten them.

' *This* –' he began.

Then something glinted in the darkness between a yellow–

stained brick building and a wrecked grocer's store. Glinted, in the light from a bonfire where fantasies by H. H.

Brackenridge and Charles Brockden Brown were being

‘sterilized’. Glinted, in a way that seemed suspiciously significant.

The Doctor closed his mouth. There was a man in the darkness. Probably. The dim outline of a figure in a wide cape, a head topped by an extravagant stovepipe hat. The shape was entirely black, the man obviously having a good working knowledge of shadows and how to use them. The blackness was interrupted by four patches of fire-tinted light.

Two lenses. The figure was wearing spectacles. Ovoid. An affectation?

A smile. Teeth. Glinting teeth. The Doctor frowned. A good knowledge of shadows, and a good sense of aesthetics, too.

A tool of some kind, in his left hand. Gun barrel? No.

Jagged. Knife-related. A scalpel, perhaps. The Doctor was reminded of twentieth-century depictions of Jack the Ripper, a shadow with a smile and a surgeon’s knife. Faceless and unknown. The killing silhouette.

The shape moved forward. The light shifted around him, but he kept his head down, and the fire failed to illuminate his features. There was just a smile, sweeping across the street, hooded rioters – and even their victims – moving aside for him without even seeming to notice that he was there. Impressed by this manoeuvre, the Doctor very nearly missed the fact that the shape was heading straight for him.

*Two. Three. Four. Five. Two. Three. Four. Five.*

They were marching. Erskine Morris couldn’t remember when they’d started marching, or why, or even whose idea it had been; but it seemed entirely natural now. The rhythm they made, the beat of leather soles against muddied roads, seemed somehow comforting. Marching was easy. Hellfire and sodomy, you didn’t even have to think about it.

*Two. Three. Four. Five.*

So they kept marching, a handful of Society men and a dozen others who’d tagged along for the hell of it, the rhythm only interrupted by the irregular *slap-slops* of the prisoners’

feet as they were dragged along the streets. The prisoners were all Negroes, taken from their neighbourhoods when the trouble had started and the fires had been lit. Some of them – the stronger,

younger men – were still struggling, shouting slurred curses in some Christ-forsaken language no one understood.

*Two. Three. Four. Five. Slip-slop. Slop.*

The prisoners were being taken for interrogation. Erskine wasn't sure exactly where they'd be interrogated, or by whom, but it was quite clear that asking them questions was what the Renewalists should be doing. They were clearly guilty of something; why else would they have resisted, for bastard Saint Michael's sake?

Damnation, Erskine, isn't it funny how things transpire?

Just this morning you would never have believed that diabolism was so widespread in this town. By Jesus Christ's little Chinese brother, you wouldn't have believed in it at all.

Don't think about that just now, though. Just keep marching.

*Two. Three. Four. Five.*

'They can't do that,' said Daniel, and his voice sounded as hollow as a Drahvin's defence at a war-crimes trial.

Roz turned to see what he was looking at. He was staring into the shadows – at least he was blinking normally, Roz noted – his eyes probing the collapsed masonry in the corner of the old pub. Roz looked down at the amaranth in her hands.

It was spinning faster now. Was it doing what the Doctor had said, trying to reorder everything? And if so, why?

'Did you hear me?' whined Daniel. 'They can't *do* that.'

'Daniel –' Roz began, and she was going to tell him that it was all right, that he didn't have to worry. Then she realized what he could see.

The shadows were moving in ways that shouldn't have been possible, growing and flickering regardless of the illumination from the few lamps they'd managed to light. The silhouettes were congregating around an archway in the corner that led deeper into the building, an entrance that must once have led to some kind of storage area.

And there was a shape at the centre of the darkness. The shadows were spiralling around it, and Roz was reminded of the way water

dances around a plughole, just before it disappears. It took her a few moments to realize the simple truth of what was happening. It wasn't some multi-dimensional thing materializing out of the darkness, it was just a man, stepping out from the archway. He wasn't particularly tall or short, wasn't particularly slight or well-built, wasn't particularly attractive or ugly. His skin looked grey even in the orange lamplight, and his clothes looked as if they'd just been pressed, despite the fact that his jacket was caked with dirt and his white knee-length socks (very fashionable in this time, for some stupid reason) had been splashed with large quantities of mud.

It took Roz's 'instinct for law-enforcement' a mere nanosecond to notice the weapon the man was carrying. It didn't take the rest of her brain long to catch up. The man blinked, a loud, clicking blink.

He aimed the gun at Roz. Her muscles tensed.

'Catcher,' she hissed.

'Clean it up,' said Catcher. 'Clean everything up.'

She looked into his eyes, glassy pebbles pushed deep into his shapeless face, and saw right through them. Disintegrating machinery on the other side. In her own time, she might have mistaken him for a robot, one of the illegal 'fraudroids' that had been built to mimic human speech and movement; but Catcher was flesh and blood, she was sure of it. Human, but drawn so far into this mess that he was unstable right down to his soul. Or whatever he had instead of a soul. The amaranth was spinning, faster and faster, trying to come to terms with the madness the man had brought with him. The shadows solidified, until Roz could see metallic joints and clock-faces there in the corners of the pub. Bogeymen. Products of Catcher's distressed mind. WATCHMAKERS.

Now, where had that word come from?

She remembered that Catcher had owned the amaranth, and that part of him – or part of his UnTARDIS – was still in contact with the Doctor's own ship. She wondered if there were clockwork ghosts in the corridors of the TARDIS as well, taking her quarters apart with their razor-fingers. She even imagined Chris, lying still on the marble floors, Catcher's phantasms opening him up to see what made him tick...

All these thoughts took less than four seconds, by which time Catcher's finger was on the trigger of his gun.

A quarter to midnight.

Samuel Lincoln couldn't remember the exact details of what had happened on Paris Street. He kept remembering that one simple sensation, the bottle breaking against his face, tiny pieces of glass sticking in the corner of his eye. He vaguely recalled lying in the rain, trying to swear at Hatchard. Shouts.

Samuel had looked up, and seen the hooded Renewalists approaching. More shouts. More broken glass. Fists.

He'd crawled away from Paris Street, and he was still crawling, though he couldn't be sure where he was or how far he'd come. There were alley-ways around him, but one eye was gummed up with blood and splinters of glass, and the other was thick with tears. He tried raising his head, then tried standing. It hurt, and he wasn't very good at it anyway.

The woman stepped out in front of him and smiled.

Samuel felt himself drop to the ground again. The woman's face seemed to shift and slide as he watched, perhaps a side–

effect of his blurred vision. Even her smile refused to stay in one place for more than a second.

Then she was gone. Samuel didn't know where. In her wake there was just dust and music.

Music?

The music was real, he was sure of it. His ears were ringing, but even through the din he could hear the rhythm, beaten out on barrels and drums. Dancing-music. Who would play dancing-music at a time like this?

Samuel Lincoln forced his body up onto its elbows, and began to drag himself in the direction of the noise. He didn't think to stop and ask himself why he cared.

There was just darkness. Marielle Duquesne would never have thought that possible; a place where there was just darkness, with no hope of the morning ever arriving. It reminded her of her childhood, when there had been monsters in the nursery.

Being young. Knowing exactly what it means to be afraid of the dark.

And were there monsters here, crawling out of the blackness? No, perhaps not; there were only possibilities, and you could see anything amongst the possibilities, if you looked hard enough. Sometimes, the things she saw (or *thought* she saw) broke the laws of nature, or the laws of physics, or the laws of time, or laws there weren't even names for. Whenever she caught a glimpse of something impossible, her spine would burn and she'd spasm like a dying animal.

Perhaps if she found the right way of looking at this terrible place, she'd see something she recognized. Perhaps she might even find Christopher Cwej, as a man-shaped set of possibilities hidden in the shadows.

She concentrated. The world remade itself around her, and suddenly, she was standing in a suburb of Hell.

He had tried a simple distraction, producing an ersatz dove that had fluttered from his sleeve and vanished into the smoke.

The man with the scalpel hadn't flinched.

He had tried a spot of hypnosis, a minor suggestion, staring through the spectacle-lenses and telling his opponent to look the other way for a second.

The man with the scalpel had just smiled a little harder.

He had even tried a touch of Venusian Aikido (because the old ways were often the best).

The man with the scalpel kept coming.

It was unthinkable. It was inconceivable. But it was happening.

The Doctor was running out of ideas.

He hurried along Paris Street, ducking whenever a fist was aimed in his direction. For the most part, the locals were too busy hitting each other to get in his way, but he realized – with some irritation – that nobody was accosting his pursuer at all.

They didn't even notice the man as he swept along the street after the Doctor, a silhouette with a Cheshire-cat grin.

The Doctor batted away a low-flying brick with the end of his cane, and muttered an ancient Miasimian curse that contained an almost

obscene number of 'X's. His usual repertoire had quite simply failed to work. He'd followed his usual procedure, adopting the basic thought-processes of a human – albeit an exceptionally gifted human with an unfeasibly large hat collection – so he could understand the psychology of the enemy, while still retaining the edge. He'd slipped into 'ephemeral mode' easily enough, remembering to think in three geometric dimensions and to perceive time as a linear experience rather than any of the more exotic alternatives. He'd analysed every move, calculated every chance. The man with the scalpel should have been left standing by now. It was almost as if –

– no, that was just silly –

– as if the man had been built to be Doctor-proof.

The Doctor reached the end of Paris Street. Oh, very well.

There was obviously no other way. He'd have to change his perspective again, alter his perceptions, turn his thought processes into something more Time-Lord-ish. He'd have to develop a more advanced solution to the problem.

*Ching*, went the scalpel as it embedded itself in his back.

Step one. Identify the weapon.

The gun was the same shape as an eighteenth-century rifle, if elongated at the snout. It was silver in colour, the same tone as the *My First Blaster* weapons that had been popular the year before Roz had left her own century, low-intensity energy weapons designed for young children. Yeah, that was what Catcher's gun made her think of. Toy weaponry. Right down to the chunky plastic trigger-guard and the zigzag of lightning carved into the handle.

Step two. Surrender.

Roz raised her hands. Catcher hardly seemed to notice. The trigger was a millimetre away from the point where it would (probably) activate the gun.

Step three.

'Congratulations,' Roz heard herself say.

The finger froze. Then relaxed. A little.

Catcher snapped his head to one side with a nasty snapping sound, and Roz was sure she heard words clicking between his ears. AGENT OF CACOPHONY. YOU KNOW IT.

REMOVE. OR SOMETHING.

'The Watchmakers are very happy with you,' she continued, wondering who in the name of the Goddess the Watchmakers were. No, don't think about that. It doesn't matter. *He* knows, or thinks he does, and that's good enough.

CACOPHONY. AGENT. WATCHMAKERS. WHAT?

'I know who you are,' Catcher insisted.

Roz nodded, hoping he'd think the sweat on her face was rainwater. 'Good. Then you know you can trust me.'

That had been a risk. Catcher prodded the air in front of him with the end of his gun. TRUST. NOT RATIONAL. 'You are an agent of...' he began, then trailed off.

Roz tried to make out the voices that were buzzing around inside his head. In his present unstable state, she wondered whether there was a brain in his skull at all, or just a cavity filled with words. 'I was an agent of Ca... Cacophony?' she guessed, and saw his trigger-finger itch again. 'But then I saw the error of my ways. I work for the Watchmakers now.' She had no idea what she was actually telling him, and she briefly wondered how much of it might be true.

WATCHMAKERS. WATCHMAKERS. The voices were mechanical and sounded like echoes in a metal-walled room, but she recognized the tones of Catcher's own voice behind the distortions. That settled it. There were no Watchmakers.

There was just Catcher. Catcher the raving loon.

'You are a woman,' Catcher finally said.

'Well spotted.' Roz became aware of movement behind her, and guessed that Daniel had got to his feet. He was probably making for the doorway. Catcher didn't seem to notice. 'Yes, I'm a woman. Look, maybe I should explain.'

EXPLAIN. RATIONAL. Roz lowered her hands, and Catcher made no move to stop her.

‘Incidentally, that’s a very nice gun,’ she continued, hoping to change the subject. It had worked for the Doctor often enough. ‘Where did you get it?’

‘It is an electro-static galvanistic rifle,’ Catcher announced.

‘Oh. That’s nice.’

A thought seemed to strike him. ‘If you were working for the Watchmakers, you would know. The gun was a gift from the Watchmakers. From their temple.’ And the voices were saying REMOVE, REMOVE, REMOVE.

The gun was pointing at her again. A gift from the Watchmakers, was it? More likely that it had been created along with the other material in his basement, an invention of the amaranth, probably based on some exotic piece of technology lying around in the TARDIS.

‘Of course,’ Roz explained, hurriedly. ‘But I had to ask. It’s all part of the test.’

‘Test?’ TEST? DID WE SET A TEST?

‘A loyalty test. To see if you could stay... rational... in the face of Cacophony.’

‘Test? I am devoted to the cause of Reason.’ IS DEVOTED

A RATIONAL WORD? ‘The Watchmakers have known me since I was... since I was a child.’ SOUNDS A BIT

RELIGIOUS TO ME.

‘Well, yeah. Which is probably why you’ve passed the test.

With flying colours.’ She started backing towards the doorway, noticing Daniel out of the corner of one eye. He was right behind her, moving in the same direction, trying to stay quiet. ‘You can give the gun back to the Watchmakers now, Mr Catcher.’

Catcher paused. Roz felt the breeze from the doorway against her back. GIVE THE GUN BACK. DO YOU WANT

TO USE THE GUN? REMOVE. DON’T REMOVE.

DOESN’T MAKE SENSE.

The snout of the gun was lowered.

‘Give back the gun,’ Catcher repeated.

His eyes dropped to the ground. Roz edged towards the hole-cum-doorway. Daniel was right beside her. She turned –

and suddenly, she was face-to-face with somebody she half-recognized. Two blue eyes set into a fat face, looking up at her. Startled. Startled and short. Standing in the doorway.

She jumped back. Daniel froze. The man made a shocked gargling sound.

‘ *Witch!* ’ he shrieked.

Roz became aware of two things at once. Firstly, she’d seen the man before; he’d visited her tent less than six hours ago, asking about the future and whether it had anything to do with cannibalism in Africa. His name was Isaac. Isaac something.

Secondly, there was a gun being pointed at her back. She didn’t have to look over her shoulder. A half-decent Adjudicator knows that kind of thing instinctively.

WITCH WITCH WITCH WITCH WITCH WITCH

WITCH WITCH

She saw Daniel turn, and saw him throw himself to the floor. She heard Catcher’s voices panicking, and heard the insanely quiet sound of a sweating finger closing on a plastic trigger. She felt her legs give way underneath her.

She was only half-way to the floor when the air cracked open over her head and a tongue of lightning leapt across the pub, igniting the space where her back had just been. The tongue swept across the wall of the building, the scientifically dubious electro-static galvanistic beam skipping from the snout of the gun and scorching the timbers by the doorway.

There was a sound like the screech of fast-flowing water. A smell of burning.

The next thing Roz saw was the man called Isaac Penley –

yeah, that was the name – as a silhouette in the doorway, surrounded

by light and fire. His shape was only there for a split second, and his scream was the shortest the planet Earth had ever heard.

Then he burst open.

## 8

## Various Gods Out of Assorted Machines

Ten minutes to twelve on the last night of the world, and there was a carnival on Burr Street. The idea was ludicrous, of course.

It had begun among the Negroes who'd been driven out of the 'African quarter' by the fires and the lynch-mobs. The black folk had rites and customs nobody else could understand, the people said, and Burr Street was the most powerful proof that anyone could have imagined. One of the men – the bastard offspring of a slave and a farmer's wife, according to rumour (but then, according to rumour, *everybody* was the bastard offspring of a slave and a farmer's wife) – had fled the riots and taken shelter in the quiet streets near the docks, where he'd begun some damned peculiar ceremony of mourning. He'd spoken words in an alien tongue, sung songs that made no musical sense, drummed out a queer rhythm on an improvised instrument. As far as the residents of Burr Street knew, it had started as a dirge.

But others had gathered around the man. At first they'd just been other Africans, engaging themselves in 'uncivilized'

dances as the locals watched, nervously, from the shadows.

Then, unexpectedly, some of the white folk had joined in; the ones who'd been labelled 'diabolists' by the Renewalists, the ones who'd become outcasts in the space of one night, the ones who'd run from their homes when the rioting had started on Paris Street. They were dancing to different rhythms, and stayed clear of the larger Negro groups, but they were all part of the same process. One rhythm became a hundred. One rhythm became a Cacophony.

Two streets away, houses were being searched and looted, windows smashed and doors broken down. Around the corner, an alleyway was burning, fire creeping towards the heart of the town like a spark on a fuse. But here, there was a carnival; a carnival of the lost and the scared and the unwanted, defying the rationalists' 'new order' in the only way they could. The last dance. The party at the end of the world.

The idea was ludicrous, of course.

Samuel Lincoln crawled out of a side-street, following the sounds of music, and saw what was happening on Burr Street.

Five minutes later, he'd learned how to dance.

Daniel Tremayne had forgotten how to run. The process involved moving your feet in a particular sequence, he knew that much, but the details wouldn't come to him He tripped and stumbled along the street, Forrester gripped his hand, tugging him upright whenever he fell. Half the journey was made on his knees.

At last they came to a halt, in the shadow of a law office at the end of Hazelrow Avenue; Daniel couldn't read the plaque on the front door, but any building that big and ugly and pompous just *had* to be a law office. Across the street, a rain-sodden man with wide eyes and a torn topcoat was yelling something about the end of the world, banging on the doors of houses like a drunkard. There was an overturned carriage by the side of the road, horse and owner long since fled.

'I think we're okay,' said Forrester, checking the street behind them. 'What happened back there must have distracted him He isn't coming after us.'

Distracted? Was that all she could say? Daniel could still smell lightning in the air, and he tried not to look down at his shirt. It had been a good shirt, taken from a tailor's workroom in Dill Village, from right under the owner's nose. Now it was covered with tiny spots of black and pink. Marks of burning, and something that was almost like candle-fat.

'We'd better move carefully, all the same. Catcher's a grade-one psycho. You heard those voices of his. Creepy.'

Daniel tried to concentrate on what she was saying.

'Voices?'

'Yeah. That "remove the agent of Cacophony" thing.'

Daniel hadn't heard any 'voices', and he wondered if Forrester had special witch-hearing. 'This is getting out of hand, Danny.

You see that smoke over those rooftops? The town's going up in flames. We're going to have to put a stop to this.'

‘Stop. Hah.’ Daniel slumped to the ground, resting his back against the carriage. ‘Catcher’s got a gun. I saw someone go up against two Italians with guns, once. They put bullets through all his wrists and ankles. Just left him lying there.’

‘All smiles, aren’t you?’ Forrester started scratching at her wrist, as if she had a rash there. ‘People are getting hurt here, Daniel. A long time ago, I swore an oath to stop people getting hurt. At least, unless it was me doing the hurting. And I’ve got a kind of responsibility to this town, okay? Even if I can’t stand the damn place. Let’s just say I’ve done things here I want to make up for. Besides, we don’t need guns.’

Her hand slipped into her pouch.

‘We’ve got *this*,’ she said.

‘I’m sorry,’ said Matheson Catcher, but SORRY IS NOT A RATIONAL WORD. He knelt, ashes staining his pantaloons.

On the floor beside him, the shape of the electro-static galvanistic rifle started to blur and spread, melting into a silver smudge and seeping into the dust. As if Catcher no longer had the will to keep the weapon in one piece.

Catcher stared at the body of Isaac Penley in front of him.

A trunk, a blue-black stump. There were pieces of horror scattered around the saloon. ODDS AND ENDS. Catcher reached out, touching the scorched flesh. BITS AND BOBS.

He started collecting together the fragments of what had once been a man, scraping them out from between the broken boards of the old King George. Behind him, the shadows were tumbling and THERE IS A RATIONAL EXPLANATION

FOR EVERYTHING so many pieces, pieces that made no sense and CLEAN IT UP! CLEAN IT ALL UP!

Watchmakers, I have failed you. Isaac, I’m so very PUT THE

PIECES TOGETHER. CLEAN IT UP!

Yes. That was his duty, wasn’t it? As an agent of Reason, he had a responsibility to take the pieces and assemble them into a Reasonable, meaningful whole. What was man, but the finest of clockworks?

He found a twisted length of arm in the corner. A fractured piece of skull. He lay them side by side, all the pieces, all the remains that still sparkled with galvanistic energy. Isaac Penley was just a humpty-dumpty little man.

From the shadows, the Watchmakers gave him instructions.

INSERT PART 'A' INTO SLOT B'...

' *Marielle*,' Christopher Cwej was calling. ' *Marielle!* '

Duquesne tried to focus on his voice, but couldn't. The pain was beyond belief, beyond description, so intense that she could no longer remember any other sensation, and was beginning to wonder if this was actually pleasure, and she'd just forgotten how to enjoy it. Her spine felt as though it had been turned to ashes.

'Over here,' called Cwej, but there was no way of telling where 'here' was. Duquesne tried to concentrate. Seen from this angle, the darkness in front of her looked almost like a desert, the ground rolling like an ocean...

'Bearing the mark,' said one of the dunes.

Duquesne tried to cry out, but a quick gurgle was the best she could manage. Beside her, two shapes were congealing out of the sands, bright colours exploding across their shadow-bodies. Within moments, the figures were wearing robes of dirty scarlet, with hoods like the wimples of nuns pulled over their heads.

'Lost,' said one of the Beautiful Shining Daughters of Hysteria.

'Lost as she can get,' added the other.

Duquesne lowered her eyes.

'You are not here,' she insisted. 'You are phantoms, like the infamous fiends of San Stefano. You are nightmares or bad memories. The last of the Daughters of Hysteria died four years ago in München. I was there when their tabernacle was razed to the ground. I was there when they burned.'

The nearest of the Daughters grinned. A skeletal grin across a skinless face. In München, the Daughters had ritually stripped the skin from each other's faces, replacing it with torn shreds of newspaper. Deep green eyes peered out of heads that looked like papier mâché.

‘Bearing the mark,’ the nearest said, holding up a burning brand. ‘Kiss of the mad.’

Duquesne’s hand shot to her left cheek. Without thinking

‘No escape,’ the other Daughter of Hysteria added.

‘No escape. The mark lasts a lifetime. There is no Reason.

There is no reprieve. Marielle of the Endless Sorrows.’

Duquesne just turned away.

‘I refuse to see the world this way,’ she said, realizing that her words seemed less than rational. ‘I will look from another angle. See? You are gone.’

And it was true. She was no longer in a desert, because she no longer chose to see the darkness as a desert. Now she was in a city, in backstreets littered with loose cobblestones.

Christopher Cwej’s voice was calling to her from the streets and the alleyways.

The smell of Paris was in the air. And Paris, as ever, smelt of sewage.

‘Who are you?’ asked the Doctor, trying his best to sound casual.

He was lying face-down in the middle of the street, his head twisted to one side, his right ear pressed against the ground. The man with the smile was still standing over him, while passing rioters and refugees scurried around them without giving them so much as a second glance. As if the Doctor and his assailant existed on the periphery of their perception. Things to be avoided, but never really noticed.

That’s the way this man wants it, thought the Doctor. He has a better grasp of light and shade than I could have imagined. He could stand in the middle of an empty field and make it look like a shadowy corner. Right now, we might as well be invisible.

The Doctor felt, rather than saw, the man’s grin broadening. ‘My name is Raphael. My designation is *chirurgeon*. My augury code is Baby-Pierre-Baby-Tao.’ His voice was cultured, English with a hint of a recently acquired American accent.

‘Name, rank and serial number? How very inspired.’

‘What else would you want to know?’

‘Well, for a start, I was wondering if you could remove this... object.’ The Doctor shrugged, to indicate the steel implement lodged between his shoulder-blades. The scalpel had penetrated his clothing, the tip coming to a halt just below the surface of his skin; no serious damage had been done, but the metal was tickling a paraspinal nerve or two. He remembered that he was still tuned to a human frequency of thought. That meant he had human pain perception, of course.

If he was going to alter his neural processes, now might be the time.

On the other hand, a forced shift of perspectives often left him temporarily confused, absent-minded, or unable to remember what candyfloss was. Not a good state to be in, he pondered, if a maniac was poking a scalpel into your back. Ah, what a dilemma.

‘Perhaps I will,’ said Raphael. ‘Incidentally, if I recall my *caillou* physiognomy correctly, the blade is currently two inches from a major nerve cluster. I wouldn’t think of moving my arms, in your position. I trust you’re comfortable, however?’

‘Not particularly.’ *caillou*. *Chirurgeon*. The Doctor’s attempts to rearrange his synapses were interrupted by the nagging thought that he was missing something. ‘Still, it’s better than having your negative impulses sucked out by an alien mind-parasite.’

Raphael looked blank. Probably.

‘It’s an expression,’ said the Doctor.

‘Oh.’

‘But while we’re on the subject, what makes you think that my physiognomy – and you don’t pronounce the "g", incidentally – is any different to yours?’

‘Oh, I’m sure I know a *caillou* when one crosses my path.

Though I may not have the finely honed senses of some of our other agents, I can certainly spot an anomaly in a crowd. There are signs. Now, as I am only ever dispatched in time of crisis, I can only assume that in this case you are the crisis, and thus must be duly removed. Correct?’

‘No, actually.’ Agents. Dispatched. The man was a trained assassin.

Trained to kill... what? ‘The roots of this madness are planted in Earthly soil, Raphael.’

‘I’m sorry...?’

‘I’m not the one you want,’ explained the Doctor. And again, he tried adding a hypnotic lilt to his voice. The assassin didn’t seem to notice.

‘No? Oh. Never mind.’ Raphael shrugged. ‘All the same, I have my job to do. Professional duty, you understand.’

‘Ah. I see.’

Five minutes to midnight.

Somebody had brought the remains of the ‘attractions’

from Eastern Walk. The tents had been turned into flags, mismatched colours blurring together in the rain, stars and stripes and astrological symbols over Burr Street. A woman was standing on top of a stack of beer barrels, her half-dressed body wrapped in a toga of red, white, and blue, her head crowned with a wreath of playing-cards. She was throwing something sickly and alcoholic over the crowds, which – in Erskine’s view – was a crime in itself. On the far side of a wall of buildings, where the town met the sea, there were strange rhythms leaking from the hold of a cargo ship.

Erskine took a sideways glance at Walter Monroe. He could have sworn he saw the slit-eyes of the man’s mask narrow.

‘Cacophony’s children,’ Monroe hissed, and the words were perfectly audible even over the din of beaten barrels and howling dancers.

Erskine looked around. The other Renewalists – there were less of them now, as some had split off from the main group to take their prisoners for interrogation – were shifting uneasily, fists clenched tight around makeshift weapons. Erskine no longer knew which ones were ‘real’ members of the Society, and which were townsfolk who’d made their own masks and joined the parade.

Then there were bodies moving around him, pushing at his back, urging him forward. Monroe began advancing on the carnival, but the dancers hardly noticed as the Renewalists surged towards them. Weapons raised. Muscles tensed like springs.

A second later, they were charging, swinging broken timbers and

broken bottles, ploughing into the carnival.

Erskine Morris ploughed with the best of them.

*Two. Three. Four. Five.*

They were still marching. Even without the guidance of Mr Monroe – or Brother Monroe, as they'd come to know him –

they still remained resolute, determined that good, clean, decent, rational order would be imposed on Woodwicke before the dawn came. Most of the prisoners had stopped struggling now, their strength worn away by the slaps and the kicks until they looked like patchwork dolls made of caked blood and bruised flesh.

*Two. Three. Four. Five.*

'Morality police. Freeze.'

Witnesses later said that the witch-woman had appeared 'as if from nowhere', and that her bearing was so confident that she could almost have been an aristocrat. They also said that there was a boy with her, sandy-haired and cloaked in cinders; some said he looked nervous, others claimed he looked like he just didn't care any more.

All reports agreed on one thing. There was a pause, of embarrassment as well as surprise, before the Renewalists came to their senses and began advancing on the witch-woman, fists and clubs at the ready.

But that was nothing to the surprise they felt when the woman dropped a little golden ball to the ground, and it began to spin, scratching new and frightening patterns into the dust.

Marielle Duquesne was sitting in a restaurant in Imaginary Paris, watching the common people – the aristocrats had all been executed, of course, except for her – eating their cake, but it was hard to tell where their faces ended and the food began. There was a clock sitting on the other side of her table, drumming its fingers patiently. Duquesne recognized it as the machine from her dream, the one whose face she'd cracked.

Now the mechanism looked to be on the verge of falling apart.

'I quite like the decor,' the clock said. 'The eighteenth century isn't really my favourite period, though.'

Duquesne regarded the machine quizzically. ‘Answer me a question, Mademoiselle *Horloge*,’ she said. ‘Have I become mad, or is all of this an illusion?’

The clock chuckled with a *click-tong-click-tong* sound.

‘Neither. This is the world as you made it, Mlle Duquesne.’

‘I? I am not in the business of making worlds.’

The clock sounded surprised. ‘There are an infinite number of ways you can perceive this place, Marielle. May I call you Marielle? Thank you. You’re still in the dark, still in my little realm, where you’ve been ever since the TARDIS lost its grip on itself. But of all the possibilities in the darkness, this is the one you wished for the most, the one you’ve chosen to live with. You see? All this… all this is yours.’

Outside on the street, Cwej ran past, yelling her name. A few seconds later a horde of Revolutionaries in ragged blue uniforms ran after him. Their faces were blank except for their oversized mouths, each one a miniature guillotine.

‘Your world,’ hummed the clock. ‘Not mine.’

‘Before you get too carried away with your work, may I ask a question?’

The Doctor’s face was still pressed against the road. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw his assassin nod. ‘Of course.

There is no hurry. I appreciate this chance to talk. In my line of work, there’s very little opportunity for conversation of a professional nature.’

‘I can imagine. Who do you think I am?’

‘A *caillou*. An element of disruption. Such creatures bring uncertainty to the world order, and therefore must be expunged.’ The Doctor briefly wondered what it would feel like to be ‘expunged’, then forced himself to concentrate on Raphael’s words: ‘Furthermore, it seems likely that your origin is of the aether, not terrestrial. Professor Hulot in Orléans believes your kind hail from the far-off planet Astra, though the matter is in dispute. We are not as skilled at probing the memories of a *caillou* as we are at exploring the physical shell, regrettably.’

‘Obviously not,’ sniffed the Doctor. ‘Astra is a horrible place. Typical

twenty-fifth century Earth colony. All pot-plants and air-conditioning. Waste of a decent terraforming opportunity, in my view. But you've dealt with my kind before?'

Raphael seemed quite happy to listen to his ramblings.

'Naturally. You are one of *les bêtes aux deux coeurs*, am I correct? The devils with two hearts.' The Doctor winced at his French. 'I am quite prepared to deal with all the tricks that your kind have at their disposal. I was amused, incidentally, by your attempts to hypnotize me. And your martial arts skills are considerable, though your left arm seems to be doing twice the work of your other extremities. I suspect the species which developed the moves you attempted possessed a fifth limb, or other such protrusion.'

'Indeed.' The man was human, then, certainly not sent by the same intelligence that controlled Catcher; Raphael was too well organized. 'You're remarkably observant, Raphael. I assume that isn't your real name?'

'You assume correctly. But my abilities are less remarkable than you may think. The human form can perform the most extraordinary acts, if it is applied to one specific task. For five years now, every waking moment of my existence has been spent preparing for confrontations such as this. As you may have surmised, this has been done at the expense of my personal identity. If it's any consolation to you in your final hour, I have absolutely no social life.'

The Doctor narrowed his eyes. 'But who were you, Raphael? What was your name, before they turned you into an assassin?'

'A-ha. You are attempting to re-awaken my buried individuality, in the hope that I might rebel against my conditioning.' The Doctor felt a sliding sensation between his shoulder blades, the scalpel retracting. 'I would like you to know that I appreciate these efforts. It is good to have this opportunity to put my training to the test.'

'You're not scaring me, you know,' muttered the Doctor, lying ever so slightly. 'The Great Beast of Tara is scarier than you are.' As soon as the blade left his body, he rolled over, ready to make his move. He soon realized that there would be little point. Raphael was leaning over him, the scalpel in his hand drawing the eye away from his face so that the only thing you could concentrate on was the blade. A good trick, the Doctor thought. Some form of energy seemed to buzz through the blade, and the object ended in a stubby handle, covered

in tiny silver bumps that looked almost like –

– no. No, that kind of technology wouldn't exist on Earth for another four hundred years, surely?

'Do you like it?' Raphael asked, sounding genuinely curious. 'In a sense, you could say that your kind supplied it.'

'The Time...?' the Doctor began, then bit his tongue.

'Perhaps not your exact species. There was a *caillou* visitation in my native land, over a century ago. Fragments of aethereal machinery were found in the wreckage that the visitors left behind. My employers went to considerable lengths to hunt down the relics.' He waved the scalpel lazily.

'This is the result.'

'You can't possibly understand the full potential of the technology you're playing with,' hissed the Doctor, and was out of breath by the end of the sentence.

'I agree,' said Raphael. 'Not that it makes much difference to you, of course. Now. My superiors in France are quite keen on the ideals of fraternity and equality, as you may know. And you do seem to have more than your fair share of hearts.'

He leant closer. 'Let's see what we can do to rectify that,'

he concluded, and the scalpel glinted in a way that was so sinister it just had to be deliberate.

Drums of chaos. Howling gods of the jungle. Shadows were reaching up out of the ground, fingers of tar wrapping themselves around the flailing limbs of the Renewalists, and the men were gurgling like children as the hands of ancient, impossible things dragged them into the dust. All around them, the jungle was laughing hysterically.

Daniel tried to concentrate on their prisoners. Savages, they'd been called, but the anarchy of Africa was no anarchy at all, just a slice of a pattern so deep and different that he'd never be able to understand it properly. The little golden ball (or was it brass?) was twirling and singing at the heart of Woodwicke's jungle, reading their alien patterns, remaking a corner of New York in the image of a far-away place that Daniel Tremayne would probably never see.

And Forrester stood in the middle of it all, in a jungle of her own, lined with concrete and lit with a kind of light that wasn't meant for the eyes of the eighteenth century. She seemed oblivious to it all. She was scratching at her wrist again, gritting her teeth, swearing curses that hadn't been invented yet. What was wrong with her? What was wrong with everything?

'This was your home, wasn't it?' asked the clock, quietly.

11:57 was written all over its body.

Marielle regarded her coldly. (Her? How long had clocks had genders?) 'Paris. It was once my home, it is true. But I was forced to depart.'

'I know. Most of your mother's bloodline died on the guillotine, or in the violence that surrounded it. You saw some of them die. Cracked ribs. Broken necks.'

'Mademoiselle, please –'

'I'm sorry. I just thought it was curious, that's all.'

'Curious?'

Christopher ran past again, from the other direction this time. He was followed by a horde of shapeless alien monsters, plus a number of hard-faced mechanical men with glowing red eyes. Childhood nightmares, Duquesne thought. The uniforms were the same as ever, though many of the beings wore armbands marked with the 'crooked cross' emblem of the eastern mystics. The armbands were red, and the crosses were a striking black in colour, surrounded by a circle of white.

Duquesne wondered what the significance of the symbol was.

'Curious that you'd want to return here,' elaborated the clock. 'Curious that of all the possibilities in the darkness, you'd choose this one.'

'It is the one I know best,' said Duquesne, with a dash of what she hoped was defiance.

'But there are infinite worlds in this realm, Marielle. Why choose one at all? Why tie yourself down to a single flavour of reality? Why not live with the possibility of all of them?'

Duquesne shook her head. ‘We all need something to hold onto, *Horloge*. We cannot live our lives in the dark.’

‘Ahh. I think I see.’ The clock nodded, and Duquesne saw a few of the Roman numerals fall from its face, a V and an I dropping into the bowl of soup that rested on the table between them. ‘You mean, you’d rather live in this place of suffering and bad memories than live with the darkness of not-knowing-for-certain? Better the Devil you know than the Devil you don’t...?’

Duquesne shook her head. ‘We need some order in our lives,’ she said. ‘We need some reason in our existence.’

‘Really? Why?’

Another horde of ‘people’ hurried past. There were dozens of them this time; faceless Revolutionaries, spiky-headed machine-creatures, even some of the clanking things Duquesne had glimpsed in the TARDIS. At the very centre of the crowd was Christopher, his arms and legs restrained by ropes and tendrils. Those of the creatures that had shoulders were carrying him away on them.

‘Marielle !’ he shouted as he vanished down the street.

Duquesne stood, preparing to leave. There was a clockwork hand on her arm, restraining her.

‘I asked you a question,’ smiled the clock. ‘Why?’

Duquesne looked from the disintegrating face of the machine to the crowds outside, as they formed a grim procession along the street. ‘I cannot answer,’ she said.

‘Please. I must go.’

The clock lowered its arm. Duquesne ran out of the restaurant.

The head had been more or less intact, though Catcher had supplemented the neck with a few old nails. The awkward spaces in the chest had been neatly filled in with rubble, and one of the legs had been beyond repair, so he’d replaced it with a fallen girder. Splinters of wood had been inserted into the arms in those areas where the bones had gone missing.

All in all, the operation had been a success. The body of Isaac Penley was hardly complete, but all the important pieces seemed to be in

place. Catcher added a final finishing touch –

a large stone, found in the corner of the King George, to fill the sizeable hole in the right side of the skull – and tried to ignore the way his fingers sank into the skin behind the man's ears.

Finally, Catcher stood, his entire body coated in a dark paste made up of sweat, ash, rain, and dust. He looked up at the sky through the gash in the ceiling, offering a quick prayer

– no, no, not a prayer, a formula – to the Watchmakers.

That done, he waited, watching the body for the first signs of life. The ribcage would heave with breath. The wooden fingers would twitch. He was sure that was what would happen. By all that was Reasonable, he was sure.

The concrete jungle had crumbled back into the earth. The amaranth had done its work, erasing the madness that Catcher had infected the Renewalists with, and now the men lay in the dust, their masks by their sides. Some of them were weeping.

Some of them were staring blankly up at the sky, the rain beating down into dull, empty eyes.

Roz tried to ignore the itching in her wrist. It was getting worse, though she still had no idea what was causing it.

Maybe some kind of allergy, something from the eighteenth century that her highly civilized metabolism wasn't prepared for? The African prisoners, meanwhile, were breaking their bonds and slipping away into the night. A few remained where they'd been dropped by the rationalists. One of them was staring at her.

'No trust of you,' the man said in broken English. 'Witch lady. Work of the Devil.'

'What?' She hadn't expected that. She'd expected it from the Renewalists, sure, but not from the ones they'd dragged along in the dirt. 'What are you talking about? I just saved your skin, didn't I?'

'Bad magic.' The man was reaching for something that hung around his neck. A cross, Roz realized, carved out of wood. 'Better get beat up than saved by Devil's magic. Jesus says.'

Then he was ushered away by one of the others. Roz gritted her teeth.

Every now and then, she had to ask herself why she bothered staying with the TARDIS. It wasn't as if she was participating in heroic all-singing all-fighting adventures. That was how the Doctor liked to describe their exploits, sure, but only once they were safely back in the TARDIS and the scars had started healing. In truth, she was just being pushed around from scrape to scrape, getting throttled, shot at, insulted, and stranded. No job satisfaction. Seriously. No roots.

She thought about going home again. Just for a second.

'Oh, God,' squeaked Daniel.

Roz followed his gaze. He was staring at... her wrist?

Her wrist. Oh God. Oh Goddess. It was pulsing, bulging, and the veins started burning. Something was under her skin, pushing at the flesh from the inside. The itch was growing worse by the second, finally turning into something that could only be described as pain, and the amaranth was still spinning

'What the hell *is* this?' she asked nobody in particular.

Christopher Cwej was being led to the place of execution by the monsters, led up a stairway of bones and broken timbers, down which blood and rainwater trickled as if it were a decorative fountain. The machine at the top of the steps reminded Duquesne of a guillotine, but there was a leather chair in the centre of the contraption, through which some form of galvanistic energy crackled and sparked.

Christopher was shouting something about not having had a fair trial, about how even Roslyn would have been fairer on a suspected criminal than this. The monsters weren't listening.

They prodded him on with guns and sticks.

'Stop them,' Marielle was telling the crowd. 'He isn't an aristocrat. He isn't one of us. You don't have to do this to him.'

'I thought you'd be happy to see him dead,' an old woman in a shawl chimed.

'What?'

'He's a *caillou*. You're an agent of the Shadow Directory.

Do you want me to draw a diagram?'

There was a wave of laughter. Duquesne shook her head.

‘It is not so simple any more. I have other... oh, I don’t know. I am not a *chirurgeon*. Stop them. Please.’

The woman dropped her shawl, revealing a body of broken springs and rusted cogs. 11:58, almost 11:59. ‘This is your world,’ the clock said.

‘My world? But...’

‘You pulled this scene out of the darkness. Only you can get rid of it. All it needs is a change in perspective.’

‘Perspective?’ Christopher was being strapped into the chair with leather restraints, something rubber forced into his mouth. ‘Wait. Wait, I think I understand.’

Duquesne closed her eyes, but the sound of the crowd refused to go away. She concentrated. Tried to think of something else. Somewhere else.

When she opened her eyes, the place of execution was still there, and wires were being attached to Christopher’s head. On the far side of the scaffold, a queue of two million other potential victims was forming, the two million who were about to die of that rare and contagious disease called Napoleon.

‘There’s one thing you should understand, Marielle,’ said the clock. ‘This isn’t my doing, and I don’t find it any more entertaining than you do. Unfortunately, I can’t stop it. My realm, but your world.’

‘Please, Mademoiselle!’

‘You were the one who demanded stability and logic. You wanted Reason. This is the end product of that Reason. Spilt blood and staged executions. Lights, camera, history. I don’t have any power in this version of the world. Humanity makes its own Hells.’

Something was raised above Christopher’s head, something sharp and sparkling and metallic. ‘What can I do?’ Duquesne was saying. ‘What can I do?’

‘Are you a woman of Reason?’ enquired the clock, its hands ticking towards noon.

‘Yes!’

‘Do you have the Sight?’

‘No!’ Duquesne shook her head, feeling tears of panic fly away from her eyes. ‘I told you. I am an agent of the Directory. I am not a superstitious peasant. I just –’

The metal thing reached its zenith above Christopher’s neck. He began to scream.

‘Yes?’ said the clock. Thirty seconds to midnight.

Silence fell across the crowd.

‘I have seen Tibetan monks move pebbles with their minds,’ said Duquesne, a sudden hush in her voice. ‘I have seen the witches of Europe summon the Goat of Mendes itself.’

The executioners paused.

have seen the works of the Beautiful Shining Daughters of Hysteria, and received no explanation for them. I have visited the ageless creatures the Vatican keeps in its Crow Gallery, and heard the mad things speak of matters that follow no logic.’

The monsters turned to face her.

‘I have been told that there are rational explanations for all of these things. I have never been told what they are.’

Christopher looked up, mud-coloured tears of fury running down his face. ‘I have been pushed from one country to another, from one world to the next. I have been told to be reasonable. I have been told to be rational. I have never been given a choice of the world I should live in.’

Duquesne faced the clock. ‘I do not know what to believe in. And this is not my world. It is the world that was forced on me by men who spoke of "revolutions" and "rationalizations"

and "renewals".’

The clock nodded. The hands reached the top of its dial.

‘Yes,’ Duquesne admitted. ‘Yes. I have the Sight.’

A roar from the crowd, so small and far away that Duquesne could have laughed, and suddenly there was no longer a place of execution, because there was no longer any reason for one. Monsters screamed, howled, demanded equality and fraternity, then vanished amongst the dunes.

Christopher Cwej started blubbering stupidly as Paris withered and died in front of them.

The clock let out a sigh, a sigh that seemed to fill the whole of history. The tension that held its face together was gone, and what was left of its countenance fell to pieces. The last of the springs snapped, the clockwork came apart, and Duquesne found herself looking at the form within, the thing that had been imprisoned inside the machine for as long as the sentient universe could remember.

The thing – the intelligence – looked out at her. Looked out without eyes. And Marielle Duquesne understood.

The thing had no face. She provided it with one.

Screaming. Roz Forrester decided to give up everything else and concentrate on screaming. She felt the thing in her arm eating through the flesh, squeezing between tendons and bones, worming its way to the surface. Daniel was tugging at her shoulder, and then her wrist split open, split open like a ripe peach, yes *another* ripe peach, Sheol it hurts, dark flesh pushing out of the split, raw and wet like a new-born baby, out of her arm, out of her *arm* –

The sky opened up above Woodwicke, and the heavens were rent asunder with a sound like ice cracking on a frozen pond. The night sky had vanished, replaced by pure monster darkness; no stars, no smoke, no space. Just the dark.

Then Daniel started screaming. Then the whole of Woodwicke started screaming, too. Elsewhere, a clock struck twelve. And stopped.

The scalpel was hovering in front of the Doctor's face. Was it really hovering, or were the hands that held it just cloaked by Raphael's shadow? Still thinking like a human, Doctor. Stop that, stop that now. Let go. Lower the façade. Pieces of the cosmic clockwork will fall into place. Circuits completed in dimensions of thought. A pocketful of chance.

'There's one thing you haven't thought of,' he declared.

‘Oh?’ Raphael sounded genuinely interested, but the blade still came closer.

‘There’s one way out of this that you haven’t considered.’

‘Really? What’s that?’

The sky cracked open. Something huge and meaningless flooded into the world. Raphael looked up. For a split second, the Doctor saw his face, and there was an expression of absolute horror upon it.

‘ *Deus ex machine*,’ said the Doctor.

Erskine Morris looked up, and the sky was no longer there.

There were a hundred thousand possible skies, each one jostling for pride of place in the darkness.

*Hellfire*

Erskine looked away. Beside him, he saw Walter Monroe, and William Beaumont, and George Mistral, and all the other Renewalists, all of them staring up into the impossible aether, slits turned upwards to a Hell-coloured Heaven. Rainwater was slithering down their masks. The raindrops looked like tears.

*and*

And the carnival – what was left of it – had fallen silent.

The survivors were staring up in shock, wide eyes in ebony faces. Even the bloodied heap of humanity at Erskine’s feet, whom he briefly recognized as a man called Samuel Lincoln, stopped his hysterical whimperings and raised his eyes. It was as if the end of the world they’d been waiting for had finally arrived, and Woodwicke had at last understood the lesson that this evening had been trying to teach it; that every civilization is just one night away from armageddon.

*buggery*.

A charred muscle ground against a shattered bone. String nerves twitched. Words began to form in a throat full of rusty nails.

Matheson Catcher recited a formula of thanks. Isaac Penley opened his eyes and howled like the Devil.

There was a sun, somewhere up there, but it was black, an impossible

fluorescent black, turning the desert into a great bruise-coloured shadow that stretched to the horizon and vanished over the edge of the world...

Chris gaped. For a while, he couldn't think of anything else to do.

'Where are we?' he asked Marielle. She was standing just a few feet away, her back turned, as if watching the horizon.

– Exactly where we were, she said, and her voice was somehow more than it had been. More than just a voice. Chris shook his head. Was he hearing echoes?

'There was a... I don't know. A place of execution. A city.

Looked kind of old-fashioned. French, I think.' He looked around, shaded his eyes against the black sun. 'Where did all that go?'

– It's still here, somewhere, said the voice. But Marielle is looking at it differently now.

' "Marielle"? What d'you mean, "Marielle"? You're –'

And then she turned to him, a slight smile on her face. Her face... it *was* Marielle's face, but just like the voice, it was something else as well. It shifted. Altered. Changed its mind about how the features should be perceived.

'You're not her,' said Chris, unnecessarily.

– Perhaps I am. Perhaps I'm not. Marielle is acting as my...

my interface, if you like. Just like your TARDIS, I'm really too difficult for one individual to understand. No offence, Christopher Cwej.

Chris stared at her. Then he stared at the desert. Then he ran out of places to stare.

'Who are you?' he said.

– Ahh. I thought you'd never ask.

The woman (that was the only way to think of her, as *the woman*) spread her arms wide, and they made tiny and beautiful echoes of light in the air around her.

– I'm the one who starts the carnivals, Christopher Cwej.

The one who makes the music that plays when civilizations fall. Sister to superstitions, grandmother of gynoids. The spirit imprisoned in every piece of clockwork. Matheson Catcher would call me the enemy of all humanity, which seems funny, when you consider how long he's been under my spell.

There was a moment's pause, and in that moment a billion possible new universes were born.

– Call me Cacophony. Call me the Carnival Queen. And I'm very, very happy that Marielle has let me back into the rational universe.

**PART THREE**

**DAMAGED GODS**

' *Have you seen what's happening in India? Magic's very big there, as you know Gurus and spirit-healers, some of them get treated like pop stars. There are these groups of men calling themselves "rationalists" who travel from town to town in these great big buses, debunking the medicine-men wherever they go. Trying to teach the people that witchcraft is baloney.*

*They're amazing to watch... when they're on the road, [they]*

*chant these battle-cries about how wonderful rationalism is.*

*They practically sing rationalist hymns. They don't see anything odd in that at all... sometimes I think this "rational"*

*planet has forgotten what superstition* means.'

*– Miles de Selby,* ***Letters from Earth*** *(1993)*

' *As I once told the reigning monarch of er, of a small nation in the former Soviet Union... there's nothing "only" about being a girl. '*

*– Sarah-Jane Morley, from her*

*speech to the Nobel Academy (1998)*

**9**

**Bogeywomen**

'Ah, well, there are lots of Hells. As many Hells as there are stories about Hell, I should think.

‘Across the universe, you see, people were dying.

Protracted illnesses, motor accidents, alien invasions, failing bodies and weakened spirits. You know. The usual things.

Every second, millions of souls were experiencing that moment of confusion as they were shoved off this mortal coil and taken...

‘...somewhere. Anywhere. No, I don’t know for certain.

Yes, I knew you’d ask me that. Well, they say that when a child of the Age of Reason dies, her guilty spirit can find itself lost in Null-Space, where its phobias and anxieties feed on smaller and – oh, what’s the word I’m looking for? – less *vindictive* souls. Yes, that’s it. Perhaps some of them grow up to be Eternals. Perhaps some of them are snatched from Null-Space and turned into terrible psychic weapons by... by certain unscrupulous persons who shall remain nameless.

‘No, don’t laugh. This *is* a fairy-tale, you know.

‘Anyway, you’re distracting me from the story. What I’m saying is that the traffic of souls must have stopped that night.

Just for a while, I mean, just for a few curious moments. Even Death must have stopped whatever she was doing and looked to the heavens... yes, I wish I could have seen the look on her face when she realized what was happening. *His* face. All right, *its* face. Every tortured soul in every nook and cranny of purgatory must have fallen silent, looked up, and peered into the far corners of creation.

‘They must have seen it coming. They must have wondered if it would make any difference to them.

‘What do you mean, when was this? Time is relative, I told you that when you joined me. That’s the most important thing a traveller... yes, yes, I know. Oh, very well. Let’s just say that it wasn’t all that long ago, on the cosmic scale of things. I looked quite different then, of course.

‘But you’re distracting me again. I was trying to tell you about what happened to Woodwicke. About what happened to everything, as a matter of fact...

It was a test. Obviously, it was all a test.

Everything had been planned from the beginning. Cogs were pushing

together through time in directions that he couldn't possibly imagine because IMAGINATION IS BAD

FOR THE SOUL and it was quite clear QUITE QUITE

CLEAR that Isaac Penley should have been shot WE SAY

SHOULD HAVE BEEN SHOT just so Catcher could have the chance to put him back together again, thus demonstrating the superior skills of –

Of –

Of –

'Aaaaaaaaaagh,' said Matheson Catcher as something warm and wet and organic plopped onto his shoulder from the ceiling.

This was all part of the test. Wasn't it? YES, OBVIOUSLY. The Watchmakers were exposing him to the handiwork of Cacophony, seeing if he could stay in one piece NOT LIKE ISAAC HA HA without going entirely mad. OR

EVEN JUST A BIT MAD. Now the room was falling to pieces and the walls were sagging, and the floor was imprinted with the footprints he'd made when he'd stumbled back into the cellar once he'd finished putting Penley back together A TRUE TESTAMENT to the power TO THE POWER OF of OF of the Watchmakers.

It was time TIME AT LAST the time when the WATCHMAKERS that's WATCHMAKERS would manifest themselves and TURN the world into a place of HARMONY

AND MACHINERY YES HARMONY AND MACHINERY

he could feel it and he could feel them coming THE SKY IS

FALLING no, the sky was opening up, he felt it in every cell in his body, the sky was opening and HERE THEY COME

HERE COME THE WATCHMAKERS HERE COMES THE

TRUE AGE OF REASON –

The screen on the wall belched and bubbled, finally showing him the world outside. Catcher saw the thunderheads opening over Paris Street, and found himself staring into the darkness.

Reason? Was that meant to be Reason? But it looked (CLICK)

It looked like (CLICK)

It looked like (CLICK)

It looked CLEAN IT UP CLEAN IT ALL UP CLEAN IT

UP CLEAN IT ALL UP CLEAN IT

Chris caught himself reaching for his belt. His gun wasn't there, of course. Even if it had been, what would he have done with it? Pointed it at Marielle's face? He tried to imagine what he could possibly say. 'Okay, sister. Get out of the chick's body or you get it right between her eyes.'

– Something wrong, Christopher? asked the Carnival Queen, out of Marielle's mouth. – No, not Marielle's mouth.

This isn't Marielle, Christopher, I told you.

' *You* did this,' Chris said, gesturing at the universe-in-general when he said 'this'. 'You ... did whatever it was you did... to the TARDIS. You brought me here. Us here.'

– Yes. I'm responsible for everything. I confess. She was smiling, smiling a hundred different smiles at once...

Chris gritted his teeth. He was having trouble telling where the woman's words ended, and her actions began. Was she saying 'yes', or was she nodding? Was she smiling, or was she describing a smile?

'What are you?' he tried, lamely. 'I mean, what? You're an alien, right? Like the Charon or something. Something extra-dimensional.'

– Christopher, Christopher, please. Just watch.

'What? Watch what? I –'

Then Chris looked into her face, and saw things there.

Many, many things. It was as though the lines of her face and the flickers of her eyes were describing things to him, showing him whole new worlds.

– We all have our stories, Christopher, and we wear our stories like masks. Every frown has an unhappy ending to tell.

Every raised eyebrow is encoded with years of experience.

Each face tells the story of a lifetime, if you can read it. Do you want to hear my story? It's all here. All in the eyes, all in the lips.

'I...' Chris began, then realized that there really wasn't much he could say. 'Yeah, okay.'

– Well. Once upon a time, she began... and Chris tumbled into the universe on the other side of her smile.

'What is it?'

There were sounds of running, there were sounds of crying, and terrible stories were trapped inside the raindrops.

Somewhere nearby, a man was rolling around in the middle of the street, screaming about a pain in his spine and claiming that things were growing out of it.

Roz Forrester, huddled inside the overturned carriage on Hazelrow Avenue, didn't much care about any of these things.

The carriage had been tipped onto its side and its roof had been torn off, letting her and Daniel shelter from the storm inside the cabin, with the seats behind them and the side-door above their heads. Roz was screaming so hard that she couldn't even hear it, so hard that it had just become background noise. Something was still pushing its way out of her wrist, a string of bone and muscle that congealed into an ugly, dark-skinned shape on the ground in front of her. At first, she'd thought the tissue spewing from the wound had been her own, but if that had been true, her arm would have been an empty sausage-skin by now. She had no idea where the stuff was coming from, but she didn't much care.

'What *is* it?' Daniel shrieked.

But the shape was already starting to develop arms and legs, and a head tore its way out of the biomass, growing teeth and hair and cheekbones. The thing raised a hand to its face, using its fingernails to punch holes in the skin for eyes.

Abruptly, the pain stopped. Roz gulped back a sob, and looked up. Daniel had crawled out from the shelter of the carriage and found himself a weapon, a sharp spoke snapped from one of the wheels. He was standing out in the rain now, pointing the spoke at the shape's

head and trying his best to look threatening, but the thing was already rolling out into the middle of the road and pulling itself upright. Roz heard joints and muscles pop into place.

'Roslyn Inyathi Forrester?' it asked.

Roz met its gaze. Daniel glanced between her and the shape, as if comparing them.

'Sheol,' said Roz. 'My wrist. I should've realized...'

The shape nodded.

'My wrist contains my identification implant. I never had it taken out when I left home, did I?'

'The presence of an ID implant in the anatomy of an Imperial citizen is mandatory under the Sixteenth Criminal Justice Empowerment, except in those cases outlined in the Corporate Faiths Amendment of 2939,' decreed the shape. 'Or had you forgotten?'

'Forrester –' began Daniel.

'The amaranth,' said Roz, ignoring him 'The amaranth rebuilds things using whatever information's available. Like, for instance, the information in my implant. Genetic data, personality matrices. Adjudication codes. The amaranth grew you out of the implant like it was a seed or something.'

'Forrester?' said Daniel. 'I don't understand. Is she you?'

The shape frowned at him 'I'm nothing like her. She's a fugitive, she's wanted by the Order of Adjudicators in the thirtieth century. And, come to think of it, I'm definitely not the kind who'd open fire on an innocent bystander just because he has the same surname as a future president.'

That stung.

'This cow used to be a good Adjudicator,' continued the Roz-shaped shape. 'Well, maybe an okay Adjudicator. But there's nothing worse than a bent cop. Now she's just a traitor.'

'Oh, and you're not?' growled Roz.

Her dopplegänger shook her head. 'Nope. I'm based on the data from your implant, remember. Old data. From before you started hanging

out with alien lowlife. From the time when you called yourself Roslyn *Sarah* Forrester, because you didn't want to have to keep explaining what "Inyathi" meant and you didn't want to talk about your family because everyone would figure out how much more successful your sister was. It's all in the implant.' Roz-2 touched her chest, where the heart should be.

'I get the idea,' said Roz. 'Can I ask a question?'

'Shoot.'

'Why are you pointing that thing at me?'

Roz-2's finger brushed the trigger-stud of her flenser gun.

'Like I said, you're a wanted criminal I'm just doing my job.

The same way you used to. Nothing personal, Roz.'

'I haven't had a fair trial,' Roz protested.

'Yeah, right. When did that ever stop you?' Roz-2

shrugged. 'See, we used to have a lot in common, but we just don't talk any more.'

'Uh-huh. Aren't we forgetting something?'

'Yeah? What?'

Before Roz-2 even finished speaking, Roz leapt out of the carriage, sliding ever-so-slightly on the wet cobblestones and hurling herself towards the gun. Roz-2 jumped backwards – an instinctive reaction, and exactly the kind of thing that Roz would have expected herself to do – then found her bearings and pushed the trigger-stud.

Roz kept her head down. The energy cone from the gun twisted the air molecules above her into peculiar patterns, but missed her entirely and stripped the leather from the seats of the carriage. Roz crashed into her duplicate, who toppled over awkwardly, her gun hand trapped under her body.

'We're lousy shots,' said Roz, grabbing Daniel by the shoulder.

They vanished around the nearest convenient corner.

Behind them, the energy cone of a flenser gun turned the surface of a

brick wall to powder.

A shadow fell across Paris Street. A kite flew overhead.

Raphael looked up, wondering who but the crazed Benjamin Franklin would fly a kite in a storm like this, and saw that it had arms and legs. It was making sickly gurgling sounds in the back of its throat.

It was all around him. The madness, the work of the *caillou*. Rain splashed screaming peasants, and where the water touched them they changed, in ways too subtle even for an agent of the Directory to properly grasp. Baptized in chaos.

'What did you do?' Raphael croaked.

'Do?' The *caillou*'s voice was all innocence. 'I didn't do anything. I told you, Raphael. I'm not the one you want. I'm not the enemy here.'

Raphael closed his eyes. He tried to remember the training.

He pictured himself, in the days when he still had an identity to call his own, strapped into a chair in a room with leaden walls. Symbols were being flashed in front of his eyes. Codes of resistance. How to overcome a *caillou*'s influence.

'You-are- *caillou*.'

But there was no reply. Around him, the sounds of Woodwicke blurred together and became one long death-rattle. The scalpel shook in his hands.

Raphael opened his eyes. The *caillou* was gone, of course.

Vanished. The scalpel wasn't content, though, and it whirled Raphael around, forcing him to focus on the townspeople.

Rioters found their weapons blending into their arms, growing fingers of steel and thick new limbs of wood. Their victims bled onto the pavements, and the blood-stains formed letters that spelled out messages from deceased and forgotten gods. A world of the *caillou*. A world of the impossible.

Raphael's scalpel turned him around, faster and faster, trying to guide him towards his first target without knowing what that target should be. So many monsters. Where to begin?

There was a city, buildings carved into gigantic tusks of ivory that

sprouted from the ground and formed arches a mile high, great arcs laced with crystalline clouds. The streets were made of cobweb, glittering pathways spun by mechanical spiders, and between them hung enchanted gardens tended by men of stone. Down on the ground walked the skeletons of mammoths, their ribcages stuffed with steam-powered engines, scholars and philosophers riding on their backs.

Chris had seen enough in his travels to know that a great many unlikely things were possible. Aliens could look like pixies, bio-machines could be made to resemble dragons, cities could be built out of sound... but there were things in this place he couldn't even name, things he had no experience of, that seemed at odds with even the most exotic of alien technologies. Things that were impossible. Yeah. Impossible.

Things even the Doctor couldn't have shown him.

He was seeing it all in the face of the Carnival Queen.

– Once upon a time, she said, this was your universe. Long before your time, before any time that you could measure. A place of endless miracles, *non*? No harsh sciences here, no mundane little laws of physics, no guiding principles. There was just possibility. An infinity of possibility. Now. Look.

Chris wasn't watching the city any more. There was a different world etched into the Carnival Queen's expression now, a world inhabited by people; people he could recognize as people, not monsters or automatons. The cities were just as large, but there were less of the impossible things. The planet looked... well, reasonable. Sort of.

– This was the world of the Watchmakers, Christopher.

One of the first Great Races. Things of extraordinary power.

Perhaps more power than they ever realized. See?

Chris concentrated on her smile, and focused on the Watchmakers in their cities; grim-faced men in robes of grey, their hands busy at machines, turning handles and pressing switches. They looked ordinary. They looked drab.

– The Watchmakers. Logical, masculine creatures. They rejected the possibility, and denied the world of wonders.

Perhaps it scared them. They wanted existence to be precise, to be

mechanical, so that they could live their lives to a solemn timetable. They wanted to understand the universe in the same way you might understand a piece of clockwork. As a cold machine. No room for cities of brass or dragonfly-gods. They invented rules, and tied creation down to those rules.

'Rational,' Chris heard himself say.

– Yes. They were beings of Reason. They proved that horses couldn't fly, so horses didn't fly. They proved that cities couldn't dream, so cities didn't dream. The shadeling gods, the children of the Pythia... one by one, they all died, pushed out of a cosmos that was too rational to let them live.

The Watchmakers took away the glamours and the mysteries, then built machines in their places. They became kings of Reason. Masters of space, lords of time

And there they all were, in the folds of her face. The monsters and angels and impossible things, retreating into the darkness as Chris watched, vanishing into the whirlpools of her eyes. Everything strange and magical dropped out of the universe. The Watchmakers held creation in a hard grey fist and squeezed it dry.

The Watchmakers. Something clicked in Chris' head.

'Wait a minute,' he said. 'What did you call the Watchmakers? Masters of space and lords of -'

But then the Carnival Queen changed her expression, and Chris was looking into a vast hall, a throne-room painted in the dull grey of eternity. There was a man seated in the hall, a large, powerful man, his face wreathed by a great white beard and moustache, his head topped by a conical crown. His throne was made out of the crushed bones of things that looked suspiciously like gigantic bats.

Two other men sat at his side. One carried the tools of an engineer; the other's position was less obvious.

'I dreamed about this place,' breathed Chris. 'I was looking for Roz, and... I mean, how? How could you know about this?'

– Been there, done that.

'Now, See What We Have Created,' the bearded man said, and his voice was living thunder. 'We Have Built A World Of Reason

Triumphant. And It Is Good.'

– The greatest of all the Watchmakers, said the Carnival Queen. The first King of the Majestic Clockwork. Watch.

So Chris watched. Watched as the man lifted an arm, placed a hand against his chest. Watched as he sank his hand deep into his own body, and pulled something out from his torso. Chris thought it might be his heart, but then he saw the thing, wriggling in the man's hand; it was shadow-coloured, slippery, its shape changing from second to second.

The other two men in the hall reached into themselves as well, and pulled out similar objects. Chris took a step back.

Across the planet of the Watchmakers, grey people in grey robes were reaching into their bodies and pulling out their...

... their what?

– Nobody is entirely rational, Christopher. Not even the Watchmakers. They wanted a universe of Reason, but to get it, they had to give something up. Those little irrational parts of themselves. Those small corners of their souls that believed in the superstitions, that wanted the world of wonders back. The mutable parts. The changeable parts.

Across the Watchmaker world, the people were grasping their irrational shadows and hurling them away. The shadows shrieked into the sky, screaming, crying. Forsaken. They congregated in the upper atmosphere, becoming one great cloud of unreason.

'Go,' said the King.

And the cloud went. It shrieked across the skies, exiled from its homeworld. It screamed through galaxies, unwanted and alone, until the rational universe opened up and it vanished into the darkness on the other side of existence.

'There,' said the Watchmaker King. 'Now We Are Things of Reason Absolute. Our... Demons... Are Safely Confined, Beyond The Reach Of Man Or Machine. We Are Perfect. We Are Whole.'

Chris let his attention wander across the galaxies, briefly wondering how much of this was supposed to be real and how much of it was just a fairy-tale. He found the point where the great shadow had vanished. There. There, in a little corner of creation cut off from the rest of the

universe, in the dark places on the other side of Reason. The shadow had been trapped there, in the prison-realm of the Watchmaker King, for... for how long, now? How long since the time of the Watchmakers?

– About three-and-a-half billion years, said the shadow.

Chris jumped. He tried to focus, tried to pin his attention down, but all he could see was the Carnival Queen's face.

'It's you,' Chris said. 'It's *you*.'

– Who else? said the Carnival Queen.

*I am not a Godless man. You could not call me a Godless man.*

Isaac Penley was lost. The whole town looked different in the rain, and besides, the streets didn't always stay in the same places, the way they used to.

*Dear Lord, when I joined the Renewal Society, I did not do it to spite you. To spite thee, I mean. I am not like them. I am no Catholic, but I have never made fun of His late Holiness the Pope as the others have.*

He tried to remember the way back to the council hall, but couldn't. There was a splinter, right in the middle of his head, and it was stopping some of his memories getting past. He'd tried asking passers-by for directions, but they didn't seem to want to talk. Most of them were running, screaming about things hiding in shadows and the spawn of Baalzebub falling from the skies. Some of them had seen him and screamed even harder, which seemed peculiar.

*I merely wanted assurance, Lord. For the world seemed to be falling to pieces, with all this talk of the age of reason and the death of religion, and anarchy abroad all across Europe. I trusted the rationalists to provide us with the answers. That is why I joined them, Lord. That is the only reason, I swear.*

He continued along the street, dragging his limp left leg behind him, listening to the scrapings of the nails that held his muscles together. This was wrong, very wrong, but he couldn't quite say why.

*I may never have really trusted in you, Lord... trusted in thee... but I am not a Godless man even so, and I am sorry and I am in the land of the mad and I want to get OUT -*

– then, suddenly he was face-to-face with the man in the white suit. The man was covered in mud and rainwater, his face wrinkled and concerned. Cautiously, he tipped his hat.

'Good evening,' he said.

'Goo' e'eing,' said Isaac, and was surprised by the way the splinters caught in his throat. 'I wonn... wonnered ifh you knoo ... wha... what was goinng on?'

The man frowned. 'I'm sorry?'

'If you know what was... go-ing... on.' Isaac looked up at the sky, and his brow furrowed, 'I wonn-dered... is this... wha'

it's like? Is this the fu... the fu... the future?'

The man looked grave, but didn't reply.

'Everything see... seems changed,' Isaac continued. 'Theyy said everything would be differ... different... in the future. Is this wha' it'll be like? Is this it? Only... it woub... would... be nice to know. For a change.'

The man in the hat thought for a moment.

'What's your name?' he asked.

Once, the stones that made up the walls of the old King George had been used as burial markers by the American Indians. Nobody remembered that now, of course. The Indians were either dead or moved to far-away places, and the men who'd taken the stones hadn't known (or cared) what their purpose had been.

But the stones remembered. The storm called to them, singing them back into wakefulness.

*Comecomecallinguscallawaybacktotimebacktotime*, sang the stones.

*Firstwewereburiedfirstwewereneededfirstwewerefound*.

'Sodomy,' Erskine Morris was shouting. ' *Sodomy!* '

Walter Monroe turned to the other members of the Renewal Society. Only a handful were left now, huddled outside the ruined pub, many having run from the scene of the carnival when the sky had opened up. Not worthy to wear their hoods, Monroe had thought.

‘Cacophony,’ he told them. ‘It’s an illusion. An illusion, that’s all. They’re just trying to put us out.’

*Firstwewerefoundintheearthinthewetnessthewheelgoesontu rning.*

‘Who are?’ one of the others asked. His voice was shrill.

‘Them. Them. Get a grip on yourself, man, you’re shrieking like a woman. The Cacophonists.’ Monroe nodded, pleased with the new word. ‘Some truths are self-evident, mmm? This proves Mr Catcher had the right idea all along.

The sky opening up, you see? Quite clearly, this is what we’ve been waiting for.’

There was a silence. Except for: *thewheelgoesonturning.*

‘The final battle,’ intoned Monroe, his throat full of spittle.

‘The forces of superstition want to take this town from us.

Well, by Go... by my word, they’ll have a fight on their hands.

We’ll protect the people of Woodwicke from Cacophony, or die trying.’

*Withleversandbuttonsthewheelgoesonmoving.*

But the men weren’t listening. They were staring, focusing on the shrill-voiced Renewalist at the back of the group. He was backing away from them.

‘What?’ he said. ‘What?’

Monroe’s jaw dropped open. He raised the wooden end of his rifle, a broken weapon that had been recovered from the home of an obvious diabolist, now being used as a club.

‘Agents of Cacophony. We might have guessed they’d even walk among us.’

‘What?’ shrieked the man. ‘What did I do?’

‘Your forehead,’ growled Monroe.

The man froze. Raised his hand. Touched his forehead and winced, his fingers prodding the pupil of the eye that was growing there. The eye

blinked in unison with the other two.

‘No,’ he squeaked, but the Renewalists already had him surrounded.

Monroe raised the rifle, swinging it over his head with one hand. The flesh of the hand was bubbling and shifting, and raw new fingers were sprouting from it like saplings, but no one noticed it, not even Monroe himself. On the pavements outside the old King George, blood mingled with the rain.

Running again. A few weeks earlier, Daniel Tremayne would have said that running was a good policy. Now it hardly seemed to matter. You could run. You could stay and hit people with rocks. The world was falling apart, what difference did it make?

He looked back along the side-street. Forrester – the other Forrester, the one with the gun – was nowhere to be seen. But then, the Forrester he knew was a sly creature, so her twin would probably be the same. Skulking in the shadows, maybe.

‘Who is she?’ he shouted above the roar of the storm.

‘She’s me,’ said Forrester, not looking back.

‘She can’t be you. You’re you. Aren’t you?’

‘Yeah, okay. She’s me like I used to be. Before the Doctor carried me off and started working on my head.’ She might as well have been talking Chinese, thought Daniel, and she probably knew it. ‘I’d forgotten what a complete and utter bitch I was.’

‘She really wants to kill you?’

‘Yup. Hard-assed law enforcer, that was me. Of course, she’s got the gun. The Doctor would never let me carry one of those. Not a flenser.’

There was a shout from the other end of the street, like the kind of official warning the militia might use. Daniel Tremayne could see a shape up ahead, a Forrester-shaped shape, and wondered how the double had managed to overtake them.

Something small and metallic flew through the air, embedding itself in a wall. Before Daniel could say anything, it exploded, and the atmosphere was filled with a thick brown miasma that seemed to cling to everything it touched.

‘Or slither-caps,’ he heard Forrester-1 mutter. ‘I’d forgotten about the slither-caps.’

It was hard to know what to say, really.

‘You’re the one the Watchmakers... I mean, you’re the thing that...’

– That they couldn’t live with. They don’t remember me at all now, and don’t even let themselves dream of me. On their homeworld, buried in the deepest archives, there are books that only the Highest of the High are ever allowed to read. The only books that describe the old time before the days of the clockwork universe, locked away from the eyes of the world.

There’s one in particular...

The book opened up in front of Chris, and he wondered whether it was really there or just an illusion written across Marielle’s face. The pages shone like glass, and one paragraph, penned in ink the colour of rust, had been underlined.

‘ *For there was Time before this; and there was Being before this; and there was Space before this. And there were Things Damned in that place, and there were Things Remarkable.* ’

– The Watchmakers, being rational monsters, never understood that passage properly. They take it all very literally, these days. They think it means that there was another universe before this one, and that it was destroyed in the Big Bang. Ask the Doctor, and that’s what he’ll tell you.

*Naturellement*, it isn’t true. The ‘Space before this’ was just *this* universe, before the Watchmakers sucked all of the glamour and the strangeness from its bones. Ohh, yes, there were those of the old time who escaped. A handful of baby godlings and ‘great intelligences’... but they were such weak, unimaginative creatures. Too ready to obey the Watchmakers’

order. Too ready to give themselves up to Reason.

– Not like me. Not like me at all.

Chris gawped. Tried to say something. Gawped some more.

Then he looked around, at the desert, at the sky full of unlight.

‘And this is your prison? This is where you’ve been trapped all this time?’

– My prison. My home. But not for much longer, Christopher.

And across her face, aeons of history played themselves out. On Minyos, the heliomancers were cast out of society, the machines of the Watchmakers replacing them and turning the planet to cinders. On the fringes of the Scrampus Federation, the Witches of Enderheid were tried, sentenced, and burned at the stake. On planets whose names had long been forgotten, whole races tried to master the sciences of the older races, turning themselves into sick things with sick ambitions... and the curse of the Watchmakers touched every corner of creation.

The scalpel was hungry. Twice already, it had fallen from Raphael’s grip. It had lain in the dirt of the backstreets, twitching like a fish out of water, hungry for *caillou* blood.

Raphael had fallen to the ground, forgetting all the rules of stealth and posture, scrabbling to pick it up.

Then, movement at the far end of the street. Raphael stood, the scalpel quivering excitedly between his fingers. People approaching. Five, maybe six. A mob? Possibly. Usually, people didn’t notice the *chirurgeon* when he was at work, but Raphael had been careless. Terrible things were happening; perhaps the people thought he was to blame? An understandable error, surely?

The scalpel jerked in his hand, almost wrenching itself out of his grasp. Raphael swallowed, panicking for the first time since his training in the lead-lined room. The scalpel had detected a *caillou*. A powerful one. A true mutation. Perhaps one of this mob had been so changed by the rain that –

The scalpel flew from his hand and embedded itself in his arm. Raphael howled, then looked down, and saw how the blood was gurgling out of the wound, how the flesh shifted around the blade. His body. His body was changing. He was becoming...

... no. Oh, no. That was too horrible to even consider.

The mob closed in. The scalpel still sucking the blood from his arm, Raphael turned and ran, every terrified step erasing a month of Directory training.

The rain was beating at his face, turning his hair into seaweed.

Erskine Morris didn't know whether to laugh or scream. They were tying him to a trellis, piling firewood around his feet, and the only thing he could think about was the weather.

'In the name of Reason,' chanted Walter Monroe.

'In the name of Reason,' replied the other Renewalists.

Erskine couldn't see how many of the men there were left; there seemed to be more than he remembered, but the heavy raindrops in his eyes made it hard to see properly, and some of the shapes on the edges of his vision might just have been shadows. Shadows that chanted, though.

There were two other bonfires-to-be outside the King George, each topped by a Renewalist who'd fallen from grace.

One of them had begun to sprout two extra pairs of arms. The limbs were pink and stunted, ending in blunt, misshapen digits. The other was the man with the third eye. They were struggling as Monroe called forth the men with the torches.

Struggling? Damnation, what was the use of struggling?

'Reason has made its judgement,' gargled Monroe as the first of the torches was passed to him. The fire was brighter than faith, and the rain didn't seem to diminish it at all. 'These ones bear the mark of Cacophony. They have been judged unfit to lead the world into the new and glorious age of science.'

The congregation began to sing a hymn in binary. Erskine found himself singing along.

'We give up these unworthy souls in the name of the future,' chimed Monroe. He bent down, and Erskine noticed that he'd grown an extra finger on his right hand. That used to be the sign of witchcraft, didn't it? Still, no one else had noticed, so it probably wasn't important. The torch touched the bottom of the trellis.

' *Stop! This! At! Once!* ' said a voice, and everything stopped. Everything but the rain.

Erskine looked up. Two figures stood there, in the very centre of the Renewalist congregation. One of them was a man in a horribly dirty

white hat and jacket, his hands outstretched, his face the very image of the wrath of God. The other...?

Erskine felt the bile rise in his stomach.

'I'm the Doctor,' said the man. 'And this is my friend, Isaac. I think we're just in time to stop you doing something extraordinarily stupid.'

'No,' said Christopher Cwej.

The Carnival Queen looked surprised, and the look revealed entire lifetimes of experience.

'No,' Chris said again. 'I don't swallow it. What you told me doesn't make sense. How could anyone just reach into themselves and pull out their irrational bits? I mean, let alone a whole species...'

– Is there a problem, Christopher?

'It doesn't make sense! Magic and everything. It's not real.

It's just superstition.' That's what the Doctor said, anyway, he thought. But he didn't say it.

– Superstition. The Carnival Queen laughed. – Haven't you ever wished that someone would call you, and believed that it was your doing when they did? Haven't you ever crossed your fingers for good luck? Or believed, just for a moment, that when you cheered on your favourite sub-quantum-para-football team, your wish was what made them score the winning goal?

Chris shrugged. 'Well, yeah. Everyone does that, though.'

– That's superstition, Christopher. And in that moment, she sounded exactly like Marielle Duquesne. – No, don't think about that, Christopher, please.

'But that's silly.'

– No. That belief, that every little coincidence means something, that somehow you're in touch with everyone and everything, that you know the universe and the universe knows you... that belief is what keeps your entire species alive.

It's what lets you carry on, in the face of the random, senseless pain of reality. Do you have a sense of justice? A sense that somehow, sometime, there has to be a happy ending and a way of tying up all

the loose ends?

‘Well… yeah.’

– Superstitions. Superstitions that make civilization possible. Superstition… the Watchmakers say it as if it’s a dirty word. They forget, or try to forget, that everything becomes meaningless without it. Hopes. Loves. Faiths. Little superstitions. Little necessities. Your race isn’t a creation of the Watchmakers, Christopher. Your people aren’t people of clockwork. And even the Doctor could never think of a rational reason why murder is wrong. Try asking him about Zebulon Pryce some time. See how long it takes him to change the subject.

‘No. No, I still don’t trust you.’ She was smiling at him still, and Chris felt like blushing. Whenever she spoke, something tickled the insides of his head. It reminded him of the moments of psychic lucidity he’d had on Yemaya 4, but SLEEPY had spoken the language of telepathy, and the Carnival Queen spoke without any need for language at all.

‘Look, I did this off-world tour of duty when I was training with the Adjudicators, okay? There was this planet called Jallafillia. The whole place was run by a church, the Church of Saint Thoth or something. I saw what they did there. They used to kill kids, just because they had red hair. They said it was the mark of the Evil One.’

She kept looking at him. Chris turned away. ‘We couldn’t even arrest them for doing it, just because of a clause in the Colonies Cultural Identities Act. And they killed kids. Babies, even. That’s superstition. That’s what superstition does.’

– That’s religion, not superstition. It’s got more to do with politics than belief. You should see what’s happening down in Woodwicke. The town’s preacher is on the streets, siding with the rationalists. The local Renewal Society is busy turning itself into the Spanish Inquisition. Not my doing. They make their own madnesses, these little children of the Age of Reason. Unlike myself, they build their own Hells. This planet you mentioned… who owned it?

‘Er, not sure. One of the Spiral Corporations, I think.’

– I rest my case.

‘So, what are you saying? Order is bad? Reasons are bad?

You couldn’t have a civilization without reasons, could you?’

The Carnival Queen paused.

– It's not my place to say, she admitted. – I do what I do, and I am what I am. I'm not going to take the universe apart out of some sense of cosmic balance. I'm going to do it because I can. Because that's what I do.

There was a long silence.

'What did you just say?' said Chris.

– Oh, didn't I mention that before? She shrugged, and it was like a waterfall of collapsing wave-forms. – I'm going to make an irrational universe. Change everything. Take apart the Watchmakers' clockwork. It's already starting in Woodwicke.

Now that Marielle has allowed me to, ah, interface...

'But you can't...'

– Yes I can, yes I can, yes I can. Could Chris hear her thinking? – All that time. All that time I've been trapped here, shut off from the universe outside. Ohh, I've managed to influence things a little. Pushing a few irrational ideas out into the Majestic Clockwork. Little spanners in the works. A sorceress here, an alchemaître there, a pocket universe somewhere else. I've whispered words into the occasional ear.

I've even managed to nurture a few, ah, special powers. Latent abilities, waiting to be triggered, wrapped in little genetic parcels marked 'Do Not Open Till Xmas'...

– But I could never venture out into the rational universe.

Not without an invitation. That's what I have to thank Marielle for, Christopher. Chris. I have my avatar. I have all I need.

There was a flash of black lightning on the horizon.

– *Nothing in the world can stop me now*, said the Carnival Queen.

– I'm sorry, I just had a sudden irrational urge to say that.

And she started to giggle.

He tried using the buttons and the switches, but they melted beneath his fingers. NOT RATIONAL. He tried willing the room to do what he

wanted, but the room just laughed. NOT

REASONABLE.

The images dripped from the screen like melted wax, forming puddles full of pictures on the floor. There was Paris Street. There was Eastern Walk. There were the docks, and the woodlands, and the storefronts. Everywhere it was the same; the darkness blanketed the whole of Woodwicke, giving birth to monsters and bad dreams. Catcher stared into the dark. The Watchmakers were there, somewhere. WE ARE NOT

THERE. Hiding. Yes, hiding. Waiting for their moment. WE

ARE NOT THERE. All he had to do was find them.

He stared.

And stared.

And stared.

But there was only darkness, and the darkness had no Reason. Matheson Catcher screamed, his first scream since he was a child, since the CLEAN IT UP! tugging and CLEAN IT

UP! shredding and CLEAN IT ALL UP! tearing in the garden.

The scream rang out across the whole wide world.

**10**

**Obligatory Chapter Named After Pop**

**Song**

The creature – nobody could have called it a man, surely –

was dressed in the shredded remnants of a dark blue jacket and pantaloons, the scraps pinned to its body with tiny nails. Its chest was a skeletal cage filled with rubble, and its face was a single layer of skin pulled across a broken skull.

Its face...

'Penley,' Erskine gurgled. 'Isaac Penley.'

The other Renewalists looked at each other, confused eyes concealed by sackcloth masks. Walter Monroe cleared his throat.

‘Obviously, a creature of Cacophony,’ he spluttered. ‘We must do the only rational thing and –’

‘Rational?’ thundered the Doctor, and Erskine suddenly found the little man’s finger pointing directly at him. ‘You don’t even remember the meaning of the word. This man, for example. What is his crime?’

‘He bears the mark of Cacophony,’ harrumphed Monroe.

‘You mean the little dragon-shaped birth-mark on his forehead? Personally, I think it’s quite fetching. I had a tattoo a lot like it, a few lifetimes ago.’ The Doctor faced Monroe, and sniffed disapprovingly. ‘I certainly find it more appealing than that extra finger of yours.’

Monroe’s hand darted into his pocket. The other Renewalists began to murmur, and some of those at the back of the crowd seemed to melt away into the shadows.

‘Mr Penley,’ said the Doctor, pointing to the monstrosity with the end of his walking-cane. ‘Perhaps you’d tell these gentlemen who did this to you?’

‘Who... did wha’ to me?’

‘This.’ The cane touched Isaac’s left leg, and it clanged like a bell. ‘This . "surgery".’

Isaac swallowed. Erskine heard rusted nails scrape together in the creature’s throat.

‘Ca,’ he grunted.

‘Cacophony!’ exclaimed Monroe, pointing an accusing finger and having ten others spare. ‘As I thought! Creature of havoc!’

‘Oh, do shut up,’ said the Doctor.

‘Ca,’ Isaac groaned. ‘Catcher.’

A muted cry of alarm ran through the crowd.

‘Catcher,’ nodded the Doctor. ‘Interesting, wouldn’t you say? Bearing in mind the man’s apparent dedication to reason.’

‘Reason!’ snapped Monroe.

‘Oh, very well, Reason. The figure-head of your society may be suffering from a touch of woodworm.’ Erskine never saw the Doctor turn, but the next thing he knew, he was looking down into a pair of eyes that seemed to contain whole worlds. ‘I don’t think we’ve been introduced.’

‘Morris,’ Erskine said formally, only remembering that he was tied to a trellis when he tried to shake the Doctor’s hand.

‘Erskine Morris.’

‘Hmmm. Tell me something, Mr Morris. Answer me a simple question.’ The eyes were staring. Oh, God, they were staring. ‘What is it you believe in?’

‘Reason,’ said Erskine, automatically. Walter Monroe opened his mouth to speak, but the Doctor – without even turning around – raised a hand to silence him.

‘No, Mr Morris. What do you *really* believe in?’

‘I…’

Erskine’s jaw froze. Monroe, at the bottom of the unlit bonfire, was staring up at him with expectant eyes. Expectant slits, anyway. The surviving Renewalists were clustered behind him, waiting for instructions. Beyond that…

… beyond that, Woodwicke was burning. Burning in the rain.

Erskine met the Doctor’s gaze.

‘Freedom, alcohol, and security,’ he declared. ‘Sitting out on the street on a Sunday morning, pretending to read a book.

Waiting for the damned priests to walk past and knocking their bloody hats off with pebbles.’

It was his voice. *His* voice. The first time he’d really heard it since he’d been in Catcher’s labyrinth. The Doctor raised an eyebrow.

‘Then let that be your purpose,’ he said.

Around them, the madness seemed to shrink back a little.

On the nearest trellis to Erskine's, the owner of the third eye found the organ sinking back into his forehead. The six-armed man's new appendages began to pull themselves into his body.

The Doctor turned to a speechless Walter Monroe, and smiled.

'It's a strange kind of sanity,' he said. 'But it works.'

Roz leapt under the stone canopy and behind the row of columns that fronted the bank, pushing Daniel ahead of her.

An energy wave shredded the front of the building, stripping away the top layer of marbling. Flensers could rip the skin off a human target in a second, and they weren't too kind to architecture, either.

'He should have let me keep the gun,' she grunted.

'What?' Daniel was crouched behind the next pillar, about six feet in front of the building's front door. His eyes were wide and wet. Roz knew the effects of shock when she saw them.

'The Doctor. He took the gun off me when I tried to kill...'

She tailed off. A loose memory; a public information poster that had been stapled to the wall of her Adjudicator lodge, twelve hundred years into the future. A faceless cartoon shadow clutching a vibroknife, the blade stained a dramatic red. Above it, the words: STAY ALERT AT ALL TIMES.

MOST MURDERS ARE COMMITTED BY SOMEONE

YOU KNOW.

And underneath, some joker had scrawled: YES. HIS

NAME'S PHIL.

A slither-cap plinked against the front of the bank, detonated, and covered the building in a vomit-coloured bionetic soup that slid across the brickwork looking for living tissue to consume. Roz saw a small family of woodlice dissolving in the sludge. She reckoned she was out of the gunk's range, but she could hear boots clunking above the sound of the storm. Forrester-2 was getting closer.

'This is your last chance,' said a voice much like Roz's, and she found herself thinking how funny it sounded.

‘Surrender now and I’ll go easy on you.’

Roz remembered the poster again.

YES. HER NAME’S ROZ FORRESTER.

Something moved in her pouch. ‘Hell!’

She saw Daniel glance in her direction. ‘The amaranth,’ she said. ‘It’s started again. It must be the storm. It probably wants to rebuild everything this time.’ She nodded up at the sky.

There wasn’t any single word that could properly describe what was happening to the town, but ‘storm’ came closest.

Daniel looked blank. ‘Can it do that?’

‘No. Not all at once, anyway. But it’s giving it a damn good try. Where’s it getting its information from this time?’

‘Well, I tried to be nice,’ said Forrester-2. There was a burst of gunfire, the front of the bank buckling under flenser waves and slither-goop. Roz glanced at the door of the building. Too far away, and it was probably locked anyhow.

She’d be skinned before she could make it inside.

‘What do we do now?’ asked Daniel, flatly.

‘You have the standard six-second opportunity for prayer and reflection,’ called Forrester-2 as the columns began to give way. The amaranth started to howl. Roz clenched her teeth.

‘It never rains…’ she said. And then everything changed.

We wish you a merry Christmas, we wish you a merry Christmas, we wish you a merry Christmas, and a happy New… oh, sod it.

The Carnival Queen was standing on top of a needle-sharp promontory that had, only seconds earlier, been a low sand-dune. Long and angular shadows – shadows of yellow light –

streaked across the desert, each one showing her in a different pose. Some made Chris feel strangely excited.

From down on the ground, she looked almost… godlike?

No.

Demonic?

Possibly.

He'd tried asking her about her fiendish plan to turn the universe inside-out, but most of what she'd told him had been vague and ambiguous. Yeah, no kidding. Apparently, it was the Age of Reason that had let her break down the barriers between her little shadow-world and the rest of creation. Earth stood poised 'between Cacophony and Reason', or something like that, and the accumulated fear and angst of the human race had acted like a kind of prayer, weakening the walls of her prison.

Was 'prayer' the word she'd used? Chris could have sworn he'd heard another word, spoken at the same time but with a different voice, and it had sounded like 'seance'.

So her prison was opening up, forming crukking great cracks throughout Earth history. Holes into the darkness. New York in 1799, Canberra in 1926, Arizona in 2012 (which explained what had happened to Roz, Chris had realized, though he hadn't yet worked up the courage to ask where she was now).

'I still don't get it,' he'd said. 'Why Earth? I know, because it was the Age of Reason that let you get out. But there must have been other ages of reason on other planets, right? Earth can't be so special. Why here?'

It wasn't the first time in his travels with the Doctor that Chris had wanted to ask that question. Again and again, Earth had turned out to be where the action was. Some places, the Doctor once said, were special. Some places just *attracted* things. Like Loch Ness, which had been home to a thousand different monsters since the world was formed – or so the Doctor claimed – from the first primeval weed-monster in the days of the dinosaurs to a near-mythical spiny-headed sea-serpent in Chris' own time. It was as if monsters and anomalies found their way there, like salmon swimming upstream to spawn. Maybe Earth was like that. Special.

But the Carnival Queen had just shrugged. In technicolour.

– I'm not bound by your rules of linear time, Christopher. If I make myself known on Earth during its Age of Reason, I make myself

known on every *other* planet during every *other* Age of Reason. In different times, simultaneously. A universe of unreason. Forever and ever. Isn't that nice?

Well, so much for the 'special' theory.

– Any rational planet would do, she'd continued, but Earth is... vulnerable, shall we say? So many visitations. So many alterations. No wonder the Shadow Directory is kept so busy.

He hadn't asked about that, for some reason.

So now he watched her, up on the high peak, making gestures with arms that moved through more dimensions than the human eye could see. It looked like some kind of summoning ritual, like she was beckoning to the shadows around them. Chris sighed. Whatever she was doing, he had a duty to try and stop her, that much was clear. She was threatening the universe. Wasn't she?

– You don't look happy.

Chris jumped. She was right beside him, and the promontory had vanished. There was a look of genuine concern on her face.

On Marielle's face.

'Marielle,' he blurted.

'No,' she said, with one voice. Then made a sound like the clearing of a throat.

– No.

The Carnival Queen gestured at the desert around her.

From behind every dune, from within every fissure, the shapes were emerging. Gynoids. Hundreds of them. Thousands.

– My children. I've been letting them out into the clockwork universe, letting them get a taste for their new home. Some of them have suffered, the poor things. Poisoned by the noxious influence of Reason. The body you found...

please, Chris, try to relax. They don't bite.

One of the creatures sidled up to Chris, wrapped something vaguely limb-like around him, and let its flesh splash over his shoulder. Chris

tried, very very hard, not to wince.

New York unfolded before their eyes. The towns prospered and grew, linking together to form one enormous city, the streets knotting themselves into something grey and ghastly.

Roz caught sight of Daniel, trying to swim against the tides of garbage that were spewing out of the alleyways, and she saw more in his face than she would have thought possible. *I know this place*, he was thinking. *This is where the Revolutions are made.*

A flenser wave rippled towards Roz, but by the time it reached the spot where she'd been standing, she was a decade into the future. Forrester-2 in front of her, being dragged away on a current of passing years. Roz suddenly realized where the amaranth had to be getting its information from.

It was still linked to the TARDIS. The amaranth was sucking the raw data out of the ship's systems, working its way through the Doctor's historical records, rebuilding Woodwicke according to the lore of the data banks. The sphere was forcing history to happen, faster than history wanted to go. Around them, roaches bred in their millions between the paving-stones as their own little corner of New York went through half a century of expansion in under a minute. Roz blinked, and by the time the blink was over, the world had turned and they were standing on a battlefield.

The council of Woodwicke was no longer in session. The walls of the meeting hall had split open in a most unscientific manner, and four gnarled, spindly figures had stepped out of the woodwork. Their faces had been like African masks, and their breath had smelt like boiled flesh. The bark-gods had tied the councilors to their chairs, or, rather, the chairs had obliged their new wooden masters by growing tendrils with which to hold down Mrs Wilson and Mr Van DeVanter.

Only Mr Wolcott had escaped, pushing his way through the screeching doors and out into the rain. Now he slipped and stumbled away from the building, listening to the cries of the townspeople around him, not being able to see most of them for the dirty water blowing into his eyes. Obscene shapes were copulating in the gutters, and there were *things* in his head.

They'd been memories, once, but now they had wide and gaudy wings. Something grabbed Mr Wolcott by the shoulders.

'Moths,' he yelped. 'Things like moths. In my skull.'

‘Shhh, man,’ said a voice. ‘Damnation, you’re all right.’

‘In my skull.’ Mr Wolcott looked up, peering through the rainwater. There was a face in front of him. Thick-set. Square-jawed. Dark hair plastered across wide temples. A birthmark in the middle of the forehead, but it was shrinking.

‘Erskine? Erskine Morris?’ whimpered Mr Wolcott.

The face nodded.

‘In my skull,’ Mr Wolcott told him. ‘Like moths, huge –’

‘Wolcott. Look at me, man. Concentrate. Look into my eyes.’

Mr Wolcott did so. The moths stopped beating their wings.

‘What do you believe in?’ asked Erskine Morris, in an almost supernaturally calm voice. ‘What do you *really* believe in?’

Even if there’d been somebody around to ask him – a faithful companion, perhaps, or a curious bystander at the very least –

the Doctor probably couldn’t have explained how he knew where to find Catcher’s house. Perhaps he’d spent so long playing in the dark places of the universe that he’d become like an amaranth himself, always knowing where to find the chaos, always bringing his own kind of order. Perhaps that was it.

‘Sorry, was it a faithful companion you wanted, or a curious bystander?’ queried one of the shadows of Hazelrow Avenue.

‘Quiet,’ said the Doctor.

‘What are we going to do?’ asked another. ‘We can’t just leave the Doctor there.’

The Doctor pulled his hat down over his eyes as he walked, rain-water collecting in tiny pools across the brim. Not just water, though. Something else, mingling with the rain. H2O–

X. Hydrogen, oxygen, and anarchy.

*The homeworld of the Time Lords, according to Professor Thripsted’s excellent volume* Genetic Politics Beyond the Third Zone *, can best be described as ‘stagnant’. Born into a society where change comes once in every heliotrope moon, each new generation finds itself forced to devise*

*increasingly elaborate rites and ceremonies, in order to disguise the crushing banality of life on a planet cut off from the rest of history.*

‘Him? The Doctor?’ asked the first shadow.

‘Well, that’s who the doors through,’ answered the second.

‘There outside was came no one else. Ben, do you remember he tracking room said in the what?’

The sky was still dark over Woodwicke, and getting darker.

The sky over the horizon seemed perfectly ordinary, though, reassuringly muddy. It was as though the darkness only wanted Woodwicke. For now.

‘Ben, do you remember what he said in the tracking room?’

‘There’s no such thing as magic,’ the first shadow replied.

*Probably the most extreme ‘rite of passage’ among young Time Lords is the game commonly known as Eighth Man Bound. This game is played only by the neonates of the Time Lord Academy, students who have been imprinted with the genetic codes that allow them safe passage through the vortex, but who have not yet gone through the decades-long rituals of graduation. It is never played by Time Lords of those*

*‘newblood’ Houses for whom a change of body is as trivial as a change of fashion, and who come straight from the loom with a secondary heart. Eighth Man Bound was described by one House Kithriarch as ‘the most repulsive and irresponsible pastime it is possible to imagine’, and the game is said to claim the lives of up to fifteen Academy students each macrosemester.*

‘Something about... "this old body of mine is wearing a bit thin". And I said, there’s no such thing as magic. Are you listening?’

The street stayed solid as the Doctor approached Catcher’s house, as if responding to his will. In those places that must have been on the edges of his vision, shadow-puppets and cave paintings were scratching themselves onto the walls of houses.

‘I’m listening,’ said the Doctor.

‘There’s no such thing as magic,’ repeated the shadow.

‘You said so yourself. Remember?’

*Eighth Man Bound is played by an 'Initiate', who sits at the centre of a circle of his Academy classmates, the circle being known as 'The Inquiry'. A suitable ambience is created, usually with a simple symbiosonic generator. The Inquiry then attempts to create an identity crisis in the mind of the Initiate; a common tactic is to repeatedly chant the Initiate's name, until that name becomes meaningless – perhaps even horrifying – to its owner. The Initiate's personality is violently dissected, his memories questioned and disassembled.*

*Occasionally drugs are used to affect his psychological state.*

The Doctor nodded. 'Of course I remember. I said it on the Avalon colony, just after I'd been attacked by a fire-breathing dragon. I said it again at Devil's End. And again on the prairies of Pakha.'

' "This a bit old body wearing of mine is thin". So he gets himself a new one? Do me a favour! And d'you still believe it, Doc? D'you still believe what you said about the magic, now that you're older, and there's a hundred planets where they reckon you're a top-of-the-range sorcerer? Now that you've taken your first steps towards Merlinhood, like?'

The Doctor sighed. 'You're very tiresome.'

'Leave it aaaahht, Duchess! He really *is* a witch-Doctor, isn't he? You fabricated us, remember?'

'Only as a convenience.' The Doctor indicated the darkness around him. 'If I don't give some form to this... madness...

then I'll probably lose my mind. And, frankly, I've given the Valeyard enough escape opportunities as it is.'

'Is that all we are to you, then? Just "form"? Just shadows?

Just things that help you get a grip on reality? Is that all any of us ever were? Do me a favour. Stone the crows.'

*In most species, the Initiate's experiences in the circle would be enough to trigger a nervous breakdown. However, Time-Lord bodies are tailored to rebuild and regenerate themselves in times of crisis. The stress of the Eighth Man Bound ritual causes chemical reactions in the Initiate which fool his biology into thinking that something has gone very, very wrong. As The Inquiry's inquisition continues, the Initiate's body enters a state of flux, its genetic structure becoming unstable and preparing to regenerate.*

‘Cor blimey, Duchess, we’re in a right old state and no mistake.’

‘Stop it,’ said the Doctor, stopping in front of the door to Catcher’s basement. ‘You’re embarrassing me.’

‘Accidentally pricking yourself with infected needles at precisely the right time. Being snatched from the jaws of doom by stupid twists of fate. Serendipity and synchronicity.

NOTHING IS RANDOM, AND NOTHING IS LEFT TO

CHANCE. Going to bother knocking? Leave it aaaaaaaahhht!’

*The trick of Eighth Man Bound is for the Initiate to keep himself in this state of flux for as long as possible, balanced*

*‘between bodies’, as it were. While a Time Lord is in this state, there is an unusual rapport between his conscious mind and the genetic data that has been programmed into his body.*

*For a few brief moments, the Initiate will glimpse his biological destiny, seeing snatches of his own future regenerations. Eighth Man Bound is a game of exploration, in which the Time Lord – deprived of his original identity – goes in search of the alternative identities he may one day possess.*

The Doctor reached out for the door.

‘Ironic, isn’t it?’ a shadow suddenly said. ‘I mean, the way you gave up your umbrella just when it would have been useful.’

‘Thank you for pointing that out,’ the Doctor hissed.

‘Almost as if you wanted to get wet. And you are very wet, Doctor.’

The Doctor looked down at his hands. Perhaps he was looking under the skin. Perhaps he was just inspecting the state of his own DNA.

*Naturally, there are risks. A young Time Lord may trigger an actual regeneration, a great disgrace among neonates. If he remains in flux for too long, his identity may be permanently lost; his body may attempt to rebuild itself randomly, causing a lethal genetic ‘spasm’.*

‘How much longer can you stay out in the rain?’ asked the shadow. ‘How much longer before your genetic big end goes?’

The Doctor pushed at the door.

‘Ben, do you remember what he said in the tracking room?

Something about... it isn’t any drier indoors, you know.’

*The name Eighth Man Bound was coined by students of the Arcalian Chapter, and honours one of their number who managed to ‘fake’ his first six regenerations, discovering the natures of his first seven bodies, but never quite unleashing the Eighth Man. Though this record has never been broken –*

‘So he gets himself a new one? Do me a favour!’

The door opened.

*Though this record has never been broken, it is rumoured that one student of the Prydonian Chapter did successfully equal it. Though this student later denied ever having played a game as ‘reckless and irresponsible’ as Eighth Man Bound, those who knew him claim that he wouldn’t have been able to resist playing it at least once. Curiosity, they say, was always his downfall.*

‘You’ve played this game before. This time, however, the rules are slightly different. Ben, what are we going to do? We can’t just leave the Doctor there.’

‘Him? The Doctor?’

The Doctor stepped through the door.

*Had you asked him later in his life – six regenerations and at least as many centuries later – he would have pointed out that even if he had played the game, the knowledge of his future that he gained from it would have been useless. He would never have been able to predict what his third body had looked like, for example, because he would never have been able to predict the unusual circumstances under which it had been obtained. Would he?*

The Doctor’s vision flickered and blurred as he entered Catcher’s cellar, and everything went dark for a nanosecond or two. A minor side-effect of cross-dimensional engineering, he told himself, his brain adjusting itself to the sudden change in environment, the same kind of ‘glitch’ he noticed every time he walked in or out of the TARDIS. Inside the house, there wasn’t any rain, but that didn’t mean it was dry. The shadows had ceased to be.

*One never forgets one’s first regeneration. Particularly not if one has rehearsed it well.*

The battlefield was a wide open plain, and there was nothing on the horizon in any direction, no buildings or mountains or landmarks of any kind. There was mud on the ground, and night in the sky.

And there were armies. One to the north, one to the south, rolling forward like thunderheads. Roz and Daniel were standing in the exact spot where the two sides would meet.

Roz estimated that they had about forty seconds before the forces collided.

'This is history,' said Daniel. 'Isn't it?'

Roz frowned. 'How did you know that?'

'Don't know.' Daniel shook his head. 'I can remember lots about the Revolution, as well, but I was a baby when the shooting stopped. It's like I've got a feel for it. Like I was born to it.'

Roz looked down at the amaranth. Still turning. 'Daniel, listen to me. This is the future. Except that it isn't. This is...

kind of like a stage-show of the future. The amaranth's making it happen, but it's not real. Not really real.' She squinted at one of the approaching armies. She could make out mounts, probably horses, and hear the beat of their hooves.

'That doesn't mean they can't hurt us, though,' she concluded.

'What happened to the town?'

'I don't know. Maybe we're still in it. Maybe it just got bigger. At least we lost Forrester-the-sequel.'

The armies thundered on, and the soldiers rode into view.

Their bodies were smooth and shapeless, like melted lumps of obsidian, riding on skeletal horses with bleeding lips. Roz looked from north to south. Their flags and uniforms were in tatters, but one side was wearing blue, the other grey.

'Sheol,' said Forrester. 'The Civil War.'

'What war?'

'The Civil War. I know this from the simcords. Halfway through the next century. The nineteenth century.' The horses'

hoofs threw up dust-clouds that smelt of gunpowder. If the soldiers had possessed eyes, Roz would have been able to see the whites of them by now.

'Is this the place where we die?' asked Daniel. He sounded quite calm, not at all like the whining brat Roz had met earlier in the evening.

'Pass,' she said.

Just a few yards away across the battlefield, the first of the mounted soldiers collided. Roz saw a great black charger bearing down on her, and she was sure the blob on its back looked like Abraham Lincoln. The armies met. Roz Forrester and Daniel Tremayne were caught between the philosophers and the barbarians.

The Carnival Queen looked like she was meditating. She sat on one of the taller dunes, her legs folded under her body at unlikely angles, her eyes closed. Every few minutes, a new kind of smile would appear on her lips, then the sands would split open and a new gynoid would be born into the world.

Each of the creatures looked completely different to the last, different in ways that Chris couldn't quite get his head around.

He'd once been told that the people of the New Eskimo Alliance had three hundred and eight words for snow. If he'd come from a culture that had three hundred and eight words for darkness, he'd probably have found it much easier to get to grips with the gynoids.

Abruptly, the Carnival Queen opened her eyes. She looked almost thoughtful.

– The Doctor, she said. – He's coming. He doesn't want to come, but he's coming.

Chris felt suddenly uneasy. She'd been in contact with the Doctor? How? Telepathy or something? Was she omniscient?

– No and no.

Chris tried to ignore that. 'The Doctor knows you?'

– Not personally. To him, I'm just a random piece of symbolism. She sighed. Chris was still having trouble deciding where the Carnival Queen ended and her words began. – Ahh, it could break a girl's heart. But he knows there are some things in this universe – or outside

it – that just aren't scientific, and that upsets him, even now. He's a true Watchmaker at heart.

The Doctor a Watchmaker? Did that mean what Chris thought it meant?

– Of course, he was bound to find me eventually. As soon as he started taking psychic skills seriously, I knew it wouldn't be long. You can't chart a river without visiting its source...

thank you, Marielle, a very nice metaphor. I was hoping that the Doctor would lose his place and forget to tie up the loose ends after Yemaya ...

Back in his own time, Chris had flown what they called

'shrouded' craft, ships that bent light around their hulls so that they became invisible to the naked eye. That was how the Carnival Queen talked, he thought; the laws of language just seemed to warp around her.

'Hold on. You're claiming to be responsible for what happened on Yemaya 4? You're saying you made SLEEPY

and GRUMPY and... er... everything?' Chris suddenly felt he should be taking notes.

– Don't be silly, Christopher. Can you imagine me building a computer? Terrible Watchmaker machines. But what happened on Yemaya was a... a legacy of mine. A side-effect of the talents I've been trying to nurture. Still, none of that will ever happen, once history's been taken apart. But that's beside the point. One way or another, the Doctor became involved, as some agent of the Watchmakers always does. Which is probably a good thing in this case, *non*?

'Why?' Chris felt like he was back in the interview room on Ponten IV, where the young Adjudicators-to-be were shut in with a training robot and told to get a confession out of it.

He remembered the sign on the wall: DO NOT BEAT THE

ROBO-SUSPECT UNLESS IT BECOMES ABSOLUTELY

NECESSARY.

– Why? Oh, why anything? There were so many possibilities. Catcher

might have punched enough holes in the world to set me free all by himself. Marielle might have found her way here even without your help. But as it happens, you and the TARDIS provided the key. *Merci beaucoup*, Christopher Cwej.

'You mean you had all this planned?' Chris remembered the robo-suspect again, the way the facial display would light up TILT if you hit it too hard, hard enough that it would have caused serious damage to a real suspect.

– Planned? I never make plans, Christopher. These things just *happen*. Some plots create themselves. That's the true wonder of Cacophony. Speaking of which...

Another gynoid struggled through the spontaneous birthing process. Its shape was fuzzy and it wobbled alarmingly. It reminded Chris of something from a pornographic magazine he'd once found stuffed behind a cupboard in one of the TARDIS's many guest rooms.

– I can't help feeling, Christopher, that you've had a depraved upbringing. Or do I mean deprived? Either way. Left to play with so many Watchmaker toys. Big guns and fast vehicles. You like to try new games, don't you?

Chris nodded slowly. 'Well, yeah...'

– Good. Then here's one for you. A game for the new universe. No blasters or aeroplanes this time, though.

She indicated a space on the dune next to her. Nervously, Chris sat, glancing at the gynoids as they slithered in slow circles around them. 'What am I supposed to do?'

– Give birth.

'Sorry?'

– To a gynoid. It's easier than you might think. Birth is, however, a painful experience, and you might find your sense of logic slightly bruised.

She was grinning on the inside, Chris was sure of it. 'How?

I don't know anything about making, er, things. Un-robots.'

– Un-robots. She laughed. You don't 'make' them, Chris, you just let

them happen. Let go of your rational impulses, forget the conditioning of the Majestic Clockwork. It's easier to do here, outside of Normal-Space. Go on. Try it.

Another smile. For a second – no, not even a second –

Chris had that old memory again, himself as a child at the Overcity Four Shoptronic Mezzanine. Then his attention was somewhere else, somewhere under the sand. The Carnival Queen had guided his thoughts there, leaving his concentration buried and lost in the blackness.

Down in the dark, something began to blossom and uncurl.

Something that might one day call him 'da-da'.

History went overhead. Roz Forrester ducked.

There was the obligatory sound of mass carnage. Abraham Lincoln's head fell to the ground in front of her, a hurt expression on its face. Shot from the rear, she noted.

It all went horribly quiet.

She looked up, shielding her eyes from the dirt that was blowing across the plain. The bodies – men, horses, machines

– were being pulled down into the ground. Vestigial houses sprang up in their place, foundations chewing on the corpses, and New York forced its way back into the world, rolling confidently across the empty battlefield. Roz felt like she'd taken some kind of psycho-active race-memory drug, but it'd been fifteen years since she'd dropped any Instant Trauma.

Daniel's voice was in her ear, shouting incoherently over the sound of expanding societies. Roz saw something that looked like a scar across his chest, a thick red line where his shirt had been ripped open. One of the horsemen must have got to him, then, slashed him with its sword-stroke-gun-stroke-generic-weapon. Roz had ducked; Daniel had just stood there and faced it. Was that supposed to be important or symbolic or something?

He was still shouting, shrieking about history and damnation and Revolutions, when the streets of America stretched under Roz Forrester's feet and tugged her off into the future.

Tourette bolted upstairs, ignoring the hideous screeching landlady who'd tried to keep him out of the boarding house.

He pushed the door of his room open with his shoulder and leapt through it, unable to resist a touch of high drama even in this moment of crisis. He shut the door behind him, and started piling up the sparse furniture of the room against it.

He'd run past the docks, where that Duquesne bitch's ship had been rocking in the water. Someone had said that the arms and legs of the blacks in the hold had begun to knot themselves together, becoming one vast and dark-skinned jungle-god of rage and vengeance. He'd run past the church, where a priest was battling a commando of demons, each side claiming that the other shouldn't exist. He'd run past bonfires around which people danced – yes, danced, as if they were actually enjoying this vile anarchy – naked in the black rain.

He'd run, but the things were still following him. He'd first glimpsed them on Burr Street, where he'd spotted their leering faces reflected in puddles and broken windows. More and more of them had appeared, until a whole legion had been pursuing him through the town, rattling their sticks and their jawbones.

And Tourette had recognized every one of them; the sorcerers, the mystics, the fish-headed monsters. They were the *caillou*, the ghosts of the ones that the Shadow Directory had hunted down and executed over the years. They had come for revenge. They had come to drag Tourette down into Hell.

He tugged the metal box out from under the floorboards and started tapping out a message to his superiors, but something was already beating at the door.

They weren't there. THEY WEREN'T THERE.

He looked into every shadow, tried to see sense in every corner of the screen. He felt clockwork fingers picking through the angles of his head, but the fingers were his own, and the angles wouldn't stay still, and sometimes he thought he could hear the voices of the Watchmakers HEAR THEIR

VOICES JUST LIKE ALWAYS even though the voices were just his own voice and they weren't there because they had abandoned him ABANDONED HIM ABANDONED HIM

ABANDONED HIM.

‘Ahem,’ said the Doctor.

Catcher jumped. The Doctor – was that the creature’s name? – stood beside him, the end of his walking-cane pressed into the melted-cheese floor of the cellar.

‘Yes, yes, it’s me,’ said the Doctor hurriedly. ‘Agent of Cacophony, enemy of Reason, destroyer of worlds, poacher of eggs, et cetera et cetera. Really, you’re making a terrible mistake.’

Catcher felt his head jerk spastically to one side.

‘TheY have ABANdoneD mE,’ he said.

The Doctor frowned. ‘Oh dear. Has it reached that stage already? Tell me something, Mr Catcher. When you scuff your right shoe against a paving-stone, do you have an uncontrollable urge to turn around and scuff your left shoe against it as well, just for the sake of symmetry?’

Catcher nodded enthusiastically.

‘Thought so. You’re just the type.’ The Doctor shrugged and approached the dais, his cane remaining wedged into the floor. ‘Now. Let’s see if we can clean up some of the mess.’

CLEAN IT UP!

‘CleAN iT ALL up,’ intoned Catcher.

‘We’ll see.’ A piece of the ceiling plopped onto the man’s shoulder, and he brushed it off nonchalantly. ‘As I thought.

Modelled on the TARDIS console room. The amaranth has taste. The little gold ball, Mr Catcher. Where is it?’

Their eyes met, and Catcher thought he saw machinery turning inside the creature’s pupils. Surely, he couldn’t be a...

‘STO!len by CAcoPHony,’ Catcher told him.

‘Oh.’ The Doctor plunged his hands into the dais, feeling around for the pulpy remains of the powder-blue switches that had sunk into its surface. ‘Well, let’s see what we can do. In the real TARDIS, this would be the synchronic feedback circuit. Even in this deteriorated state, I should be able to achieve some kind of... ah.’

The dais made a tiny burping noise, then began to solidify.

The Doctor nodded. ‘There. The Stattenheim-Waldorf technique. They knew a thing or two about TARDIS

configuration, Stattenheim and Waldorf. Which some might think was odd, seeing as they came from sixteenth-century Berlin. Still, there are patterns...’

He looked around the room as he said it. Catcher followed suit, and felt himself jump again. The sticky walls of the cellar were folding in on themselves, revealing harder, sharper surfaces on the other side.

‘Do you know what they call this kind of procedure, where I come from?’ pondered the Doctor. ‘They call it "the flower that never dies". Order blossoms from chaos. Charmingly pretentious, I always thought.’

Catcher shook his head, and it rattled. He had no idea what the man was talking about. And he *still* hated flowers.

She sat at a small table in the corner of the saloon, head resting in a puddle of spittle and alcohol. The pianola was thumping out a tune with a *dumbity-dumb, dumbity-dumb* rhythm, but the high heels of the dancing-girls were clacking against the floorboards to a completely different tempo.

When the doors of the saloon swung open, Doc Amaranth was standing on the far side. His head was a spinning golden sphere the size of a soccer ball, and his stetson hovered several inches above the shiny surface. They said Doc Amaranth was the heart of this town, wherever this town was, and that everything that happened here revolved around him.

‘The shootin’ tootin’ Falardi brothers are back in town!’ he squealed. ‘Lock up yer wimmen!’

Falardi. Roz Forrester looked up, wiping the phlegm-flavoured beer (or was it beer-flavoured phlegm?) from the side of her face. Falardi, Falardi, Falardi. She knew that name.

She’d heard it before, centuries ago, in the days before history had carried her away from New York and dumped her in this louse-ridden two-horse town. Falardi. There was something about the name she didn’t like. Doc Amaranth was supposed to know all about history, but she couldn’t help feeling that he’d messed up this time.

The doors swung open again, knocking the Doc across the room and

causing him to land on top of a card table that shattered with the appropriate sound-effect. One of the Falardi brothers stood in the doorway. The pianola, knowing a dangerous customer when it saw one, stopped playing.

'Ah'm here to see th' sheriff,' Big Jim Falardi said, drooling from two sets of grey-lipped prehensile jaws. 'Whar is she?'

Nobody spoke. Nobody moved. Roz hiccuped.

'Youse all deaf?' demanded the Falardi, waving a six-shooter in one of his six shooting hands. 'Ah said, whar's Sheriff Forrester?'

Roz jumped. Sheriff? How long had it been since she was a sheriff? She was an outlaw, now. Why, back in New York, they'd even had posters printed up. WANTED: FOR THE

ATTEMPTED MURDER OF SAMUEL LINCOLN AND

VARIOUS OFFENCES AGAINST HISTORY.

'You looking for me?' said the other Roz Forrester.

She was standing on the far side of the creature, out in the street, and black light was glinting off her silver badge, illuminating the sigil of the Adjudicators. The Falardi turned, its claw tightening on the trigger-stud of its gun.

'Go ahead,' said Forrester-2. 'Make my standard Imperial rotational period.'

But the next thing Roz Forrester knew – the real Roz Forrester, the one who sat in the saloon and dribbled sarsaparilla onto her shawl – the streets of the town were full of dust-clouds, a phantom posse rolling into Repentance on a wave of tumbleweed and horse-flesh, all guns blazing. At the head of the posse was an old man with white hair, a black hat on his head, a machine-gun in his arms. The *real* man with no name.

Both Sheriff Forrester and the Falardi turned their guns on him, but nobody was fast enough on the draw when the enemy had industrial-age weaponry. Old Father Time and his gang had ridden into Repentance, and they had history on their side.

The machine gun rattled, and the town was promptly cleaned up.

**11**

**Great Executions**

The ground stopped moving. America got fed up with growing and decided to just sit there instead.

Daniel Tremayne looked around. He was in a desert, like the ones he'd heard you could find deep in the heart of the country, and the sky was still dark, darker than he'd ever seen it. A few yards away, there were men in uniform; Daniel knew the militia when he saw them, even if they *did* have shiny faces that looked like they'd started melting. There were other men amongst the soldiers, people with white coats and high foreheads. They were nodding, holding slabs of paper covered in ticks and crosses.

Cautiously, Daniel walked towards them. He became aware of people at his back, watching but not moving. A million witnesses. Something was going to happen in this desert, then, something important.

'Test number one,' said one of the soldiers, and tried to force a pair of dark-lensed spectacles into Daniel's hands.

'Nothing wrong with *my* eyes,' said Daniel. 'What's happening?'

The soldier looked surprised by his curiosity. That's all right, thought Daniel, I'm surprised by it too. 'We're ready for the first test,' the man said. 'Bomb's all set to go.'

'Bomb?'

'Three, two, one, hit it,' said a whitecoat, and there was a flash of light that seemed to stick Daniel's eyeballs to the back of his skull. Oddly, the explosion didn't make a sound. A fist of fire pounded into the desert up ahead, turning the sands to glass. A cloud the shape of a mushroom sprouted from the burning earth, towering over them and raining poisonous dust down onto their heads.

The audience applauded. Daniel wondered how they could just sit by and watch as something like that happened. That thought seemed alien to him, somehow.

'Cool,' said a soldier with lots of stripes up his ann.

'Prepare for live test.'

Live test? Daniel Tremayne shook his head. ‘People,’ he said, and thought of the soldiers he’d seen in the Revolution, wondering what they would have looked like if the English had used the Bomb instead of bullets. ‘What does it do to people?’

‘Like I said,’ murmured the soldier, lighting a cigar and stuffing it into an appropriately sized hole in his face. ‘Prepare for live test.’

No.

Daniel grabbed him by the collar of his uniform. ‘Why don’t they stop it?’ he demanded. ‘Why doesn’t somebody *stop* this?’

The soldier shrugged. ‘Who’d want to get involved?’ he said.

A sharp-winged flying machine landed nearby. The Bomb was loaded into its bay, and the machine took off again, buzzing happily. An expectant hush fell over the audience.

Daniel Tremayne made a decision, and the world turned accordingly.

Christopher Cwej concentrated...

No he didn’t. Christopher Cwej stopped concentrating, and let himself just *be* instead of trying to be *something*. Every now and then his brain tried warning him that this was stupid, that this was dangerous, that this was no different from what had happened to him on Yemaya. Even the way that all his senses were blurring together, with new ones occasionally popping up unexpectedly inside his nervous system...

Without warning, a gynoid erupted out of the ground with an almighty *blunch*. Chris jumped. The thing stretched, turning into a rectangle of quivering flesh with a protoplasmic limb at each corner. A stubby lump pushed itself out from its surface. Two deep, featureless pits were set into the lump, and the pits were staring at him

– Not bad, said the Carnival Queen. – You’re still trying too hard, though. Trying to force your children into shapes you can understand, *oui*? Look. Two arms, two legs, and a face.

‘Er,’ said Chris. The gynoid bowed gracefully, turned, and floated off across the desert, lifting itself off the ground like a kite.

– How do you feel?

‘Um... fine. Kind of funny.’

– Ahh, well. That's only to be expected. The Carnival Queen closed her eyes, and sighed happily. – After all, you have just done something that's scientifically impossible.

'Oh,' said Chris. 'I wondered about that.'

Roz was running again. Not running away, though, not this time. She was wearing a uniform – she wasn't sure where she'd found it – and there were others like her, men with flags and guns, covering her rear. Doc Amaranth was still with her, but he'd lost his body, and now he was just a little golden ball drilling a hole in her khaki pocket.

Roz wasn't sure where she was running to, but she knew that wherever it was, the enemy would be there. She was in front of the U.S. Army, pushing back the frontiers again. She wasn't even sure what country this was, but she could see a city up ahead, sparkling in the sticky yellow sunlight. Not an American city. The enemy capital, maybe?

There were explosions at her back. Instinctively, Roz ducked. Seen from outside space and time, the bangs and crackles would be spelling out messages, each detonation a dot to be joined to form the words 'HELP, I'M A PRISONER IN

A HISTORY FACTORY'. Behind her, the army had been decimated, torn apart by a moral minefield. She saw the last of her boys running towards her, but one false step and he was gone, blasted into tiny obsidian splinters.

For a second, Roz couldn't remember which of the two Roz Forresters she was.

The sharp-winged flying machine passing overhead made her duck again, but it was marked with her army's colours, the red, white, and blue of democracy and Reason. The plane turned above the shining city, dropped something, sped away.

Roz watched as the heavy metallic shape of the bomb – the Bomb – fell towards the enemy capital.

In the silent moments before it hit, Roz found herself wondering exactly where the Bomb would land. Everybody knew the name of the city that the first atomic weapon had levelled, natch, but the detail... had it landed in a park? A square? On the roof of a corner-store? Had it dropped onto somebody's home, or into somebody's yard? Had the owner looked up and wondered what was happening just before the

device had detonated and their atoms had been –

The Bomb hit its target. A wave of heat and silence knocked Roz off her feet.

The room had a curious exotic smell that Daniel Tremayne couldn't place. The walls were covered with circles of brass, and everything was lit with a cool, creamy lamplight.

'I can hear whispering,' said Daniel.

'Naturally,' said one of the brass circles, as it erupted into a mouth. 'This is the place where history is remembered.

You've heard the sounds before?'

Daniel nodded. 'Ever since... down Catcher's cellar.'

'And that was the first time?' asked the room.

Daniel had to think for a moment. 'No. Even before that.

Sometimes I get... memories. Dreams.'

'About what, may I ask?'

'Things. The Revolution. I can see men, marching in snow.

Fighting. Dying.' He shook his head. 'If I think about them hard enough, I can hear the voices. Telling me about history.

But I don't care about history.'

'You seemed very concerned about the Bomb.'

Another shrug. 'They were going to drop it on people. Kill people. Lots of people.'

'Not as many as died in the Revolution.'

Daniel didn't know what kind of answer the room wanted.

'Listen to me. Please. The human race is a gifted species, Daniel Tremayne. A long time ago, certain... powers...

conspired to ensure that your species developed special skills.

Special instincts. In the future, those instincts will be called

"psychic", but not yet. Now they're just feelings. Not scientific phenomena, just... possibilities.'

'Instincts?' That struck a chord, somehow. 'Have I got these instincts, then? Is that what you're telling me?'

'Yes. And yours are more blatant than most. In the past, your race put its faith in gods and monsters. Humanity believed in the power of higher forces. It doesn't matter whether those forces were demons or kings, the Devil or the English. Either way, mankind was at the mercy of something greater, something it didn't aspire to understand.

'That's changing, now. The human race is ready to take responsibility for its own actions, rather than leaving its fate in the hands of supernatural beings. That's the true meaning of the Age of Reason, Daniel. Control. Control over one's own destiny. It might take millennia for you to understand it fully, but that's what's starting to happen.'

'I don't understand,' said Daniel. 'What's that got to do with these instincts you're telling me about?'

'Your world is changing. And your race's abilities are changing to suit it.' The mouth paused for a moment, and Daniel guessed it was remembering some kind of bad experience. How could a mouth have a bad experience?

'Earlier, there was a woman in this room named Marielle. She had blatant powers, also, but she was from a slightly earlier generation than you. Her abilities allowed her to seek out the monsters and the angels and the spectres. As a side-effect, she could also detect other anomalies, such as myself and my crew.'

'You're talking like you were a ship,' Daniel noted.

'Yes. Please excuse me. Sometimes I forget where I end and the TARDIS begins.'

Daniel didn't ask what a TARDIS was. The word seemed to make sense, all of a sudden.

'But you're a child of the Age of Reason,' the mouth continued. 'In you, the powers have evolved. Tuned themselves for life on a rational planet. You have an instinct for those forces that rule the world now, in an age where mankind is beginning to leave the darkness behind, and understand its capabilities. And its responsibilities.'

‘History,’ said Daniel. ‘Is that what it is you’re saying?

Like I’ve got an instinct for history.’

‘Yes.’

Daniel just nodded. Part of his head was telling him that this was stupid, that none of this meant anything, but the rest of him was taking it like it was old news. ‘Am I the first?’

‘Not quite. There are others like you. Many in France, I believe. But you belong to the first generation that can truly be called psychic, unlike Marielle, whose abilities were vague and undefined. They used to call that "The Sight".’

Daniel cocked his head. He could hear the voices whispering, proper words this time instead of garbled hisses.

And now he realized that the words had *always* been there, but only now – in the presence of this thing that called itself a ship

– could he hear them properly.

‘History’s calling me,’ said Daniel.

‘As always,’ said the mouth.

Some of the Indian tribes believed that if the eyes of a dead man were removed, the soul would be unable to find its way to the happy hunting grounds, or wherever it was they were supposed to go. Erskine had heard stories of colonists deliberately shooting out the eyes of native corpses, just to irritate the families of the departed.

But the blinded spirits had returned now, and they were leading their ghostly buffalo herds through the heavens, tearing crazed zigzags across the skies. On Burr Street, the hoofs of the Devil’s cattle had ripped open the roofs of the houses as they’d passed overhead, and there were cries of horror from the occupants as the impossible rain lapped at the rooms inside. Most of the townspeople had shut themselves in their homes and barricaded the doors when the troubles had started. Now it didn’t seem to make much difference.

Erskine tried not to remember what had happened – what had almost happened – outside the King George. Even the memory of the man in the white hat would have to be pushed to one side, if he wanted to get through this bastard night without losing his grip. Without losing his

grip *again*, he thought. He guessed the others were feeling the same way; even Walter Monroe seemed willing to forget his previous zeal, and now he was ushering the refugees from Burr Street towards the few places of shelter that remained, trying his best to appear concerned and sympathetic. The sackcloth masks littered the streets, discarded and unwanted.

Monroe still looked like an arse, though.

A figure in a stovepipe hat ran past. Erskine only caught a glimpse of the face, but he was sure the man wasn't a local.

The stranger was screaming himself stupid, yelling French words in an American-English accent and tearing at the flesh of his arms with his fingernails, making stripes of blood that ran in the rain.

Erskine tried calling out to him, offering him help. The man didn't listen. He vanished into the alleyways of Woodwicke, seemingly oblivious to the world around him. Erskine frowned. Satan's Cock, he thought, perhaps there are some people who just can't be brought back from the edge.

'WhaT di?d YOU do?' asked Catcher.

The room was glorious to behold. The walls were solid, the roundels perfect circles. The ceiling was ablaze with white light. The dais sparkled.

'Your cellar was still linked to the TARDIS,' the Doctor muttered, his hands playing across fresh new buttons and dials. 'Just a matter of pulling everything together and pouring the contents of one into the other.'

Catcher blinked, and had the sudden irrational feeling that one of his eyelids was about to drop off. 'My CeLLar...?'

'Has been absorbed by my ship. Welcome aboard.' He finished his arcane hand-gestures, flicking a speck of dust off the dais. Then he looked around, taking in the array of ornate wooden chairs and elongated cushioned seats that lay scattered across the room. 'Although I'm not sure where the new furnishings have come from. Nineteenth century. French. Not mine, and certainly not yours.' He patted the dais. 'Perhaps the TARDIS is feeling a little queasy. I wonder where Chris and Wolsey –'

He broke off.

‘We seem to have company,’ he said, under his breath.

‘The scanner.’

Scanner? Catcher was unfamiliar with the word, but the Doctor had turned to face the wall, where the grey screen had been. Even the screen was a marvel now, a glittering rectangle instead of the terrible belching thing that had adorned the wall of the cellar. But what it was showing...

Oh.

It was too big NOT BIG too EVERYTHING too much EVERYTHING he couldn’t look at it LOOK??? AT IT his head wasn’t BIG big enough to hold IT ALL OH FATHER

OH MOTHER it was so BIG IT SPILLED out of his eyes and into his EARS and into every SENSE he HAD the thing on the screen THE THING ON THE SCREEN IT WAS IT WAS IT

WAS –

‘CaCCCOpphonYYyy !’ screamed Catcher.

– That’s as good a name as any, said the thing.

Roz Forrester slipped into the nearest empty seat. She’d needed to find cover, to shelter from the fall-out that poisoned the world outside, and the cinema had been the closest building. She didn’t know what a cinema was doing in the middle of a warzone, but the amaranth assured her that such things were perfectly normal here.

On the screen several jungle wars were in progress, and various unusual atrocities had been captured on celluloid. In the aisles of the cinema, usherettes were selling self-igniting flags to college students. Every time somebody was shot on the screen, the students would hiss and wave their burning star-spangled banners.

The doughy-faced man in the next seat nudged Roz’s arm.

‘This is the good bit,’ he drawled.

On the screen, the President of the United States of Decay was driven to his execution, smiling and waving at the photographers. The students didn’t know whether to hiss or cheer. By the side of the road, a man in a monk’s habit stood on a grassy knoll, aiming a sniper rifle.

The President's head cherry-bombed open. Lee Harvey Oswald stood up from his seat next to Roz and clapped.

'Cool!' he said, and was more than a little surprised when some Adjudicators arrived and dragged him out of the cinema.

Roz ignored the commotion, and bought a tub of ice cream.

The wars continued on the big screen. Wars in the jungle, wars in the desert, wars in the stratosphere. The centuries passed and America fell, but its curse lingered on. There in the future, there were two power-blocs, just as there always had been, and if they weren't the USA and the USSR, then they might as well have been. Ion-jet rockets pushed the frontier out into space, men with cowboy moustaches and stupid accents spreading their gun-law across the cosmos.

Finally, the Earth died by fire, great arks carrying humanity's leftovers away to safety. There were black-skinned slaves on the ships, same as always. The slaves were one-eyed, rough-skinned, and extraterrestrial, but a slave was a slave was a slave was a slave.

The film ran out. The cinema went dark.

'Behind you,' said the mouth.

Daniel Tremayne turned. Behind him was a doorway, the only exit from the room with the brass roundels. The doorway was dark. On the other side the whispers were louder, and futures were waiting for someone to come along and make them.

'How's one man supposed to change history?' he asked.

'One man always does,' replied the mouth. 'But no one ever realized it, until now. Perhaps the revolutions have more to do with economics than with freedom and high ideals.

Perhaps America only wanted its independence so that it no longer had to pay taxes to the British. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter what the reasons are. Man has taken history by the throat. Looked the kings and the monsters in the face.

Remade the world. How did Kilkan Si Ishkavaarr put it...? "It is a great nation that detests its leaders".'

'Who?'

‘Kilkan Si Ishkavaarr. A Draconian diplomat. Much like Thomas Jefferson, but with a bumpier head.’

‘I just wanted to get on with my life,’ Daniel muttered.

‘But you already made your decision. When you saved Roslyn Forrester’s life. And again, when you wished to stop the Bomb being used.’

‘Was that the future? Forrester said it was the future.’

‘Yes. The future isn’t always good, but –’

‘– but that just means I’ve got to make a better one, is that the idea?’ Daniel shrugged. ‘And I’ve already made the decision. Hahh.’

He stepped forward, towards the doorway.

‘One more thing,’ he said.

‘Yes?’

‘Who’re you?’

The mouth sighed. ‘I used to be an interface. I used to be a point of contact between the TARDIS and its operators. But the TARDIS had its own ideas, as it always does. Now, I fear I’m simply a tool of the ship.’

Daniel nodded. ‘Didn’t understand a word of that.’

‘Nonetheless, I did appreciate the opportunity to tell someone about it,’ said the mouth.

‘Pleasure,’ said Daniel Tremayne, and stepped out into the darkness.

‘Listen. The universe is full of creatures that can get inside your soul. Things that try to take away the very things that make you who you are… are you listening?’

Yes, I’m listening. The words were so loud in Chris’s head that he wondered if one of his gynoids would be born with the sentence woven into its body, like letters in a stick of rock.

The Doctor’s warning. Maybe the Doctor had seen this coming when he’d said those words, all those months ago.

Maybe the Carnival Queen was the one he’d been warning Chris about

all along.

‘Things that try to take away the very things that make you who you are…’ But what if the ‘things’ weren’t evil, or mad, or even bug-eyed monsters? What if the ‘things’ just wanted a chance to live in the kind of universe they felt they deserved?

And what if the ‘things’ actually seemed to *like* you?

– Tell me about your history, the Carnival Queen suddenly said. And the word ‘history’ stuck in her throat. – Tell me.

Tell me about the place where you were shaped.

‘Shaped?’ queried Chris. Funny way of putting it.

– Shaped. I think that’s the word I mean. I’m sorry if I sound distracted, Christopher, I’m somewhere else at the moment. Trying to have two conversations at once. Yes.

Shaped.

Chris shrugged. ‘Well… we lived on level fifty-three of the city. I mean, my family. We weren’t poor or anything. But Dad said we had to be careful, because the Adjudicators didn’t trust our bloodline. He said they always got suspicious of Adjudicators who interbred, however long their families had been on the force. Dad used to… um.’

– Chris?

‘Sorry. Just had this memory. Um. Frisbee. Why am I telling you all of this?’

– Ah. All those terrible, pointless restrictions you must have grown up with. Always having to be careful. Always having to look over your shoulder to make sure you were still in line. Oh, that’s better.

‘What?’

– You just made another gynoid. Look.

‘I did? Cruk. Didn’t notice.’

– Still much too rational, though. See, it’s even got a little nose. Cute.

‘Er. Look, I was going to ask… what about Roz and the Doctor? You said –’

– They'll be here. Now stop concentrating.

'Oh yeah. Sorry.'

Roz stumbled through the darkness, feeling her hands tear through the silver screen. The amaranth in her pocket jerked and skittered, trying to spin but not being able to find any new information to work from. The floor lurched under her feet, and she could hear waves lapping in the blackness. This was wrong. Sheol, of course it was wrong. This whole thing was like a bad Trauma trip, history pushing her from one timezone to the next with no sense of control. This, she thought, must be how Daniel feels all the time.

The amaranth gave one final turn, devised one last scenario, then gave up and was still. The cinema had turned into the hold of a ship, and the seats had become shelves. There was a smell...

Roz gagged.

There were maybe eighty blacks in the hold. Africans, Roz told herself, what the hell are you thinking of? They lined the shelves, tied to the walls with chains, their eyes white and empty, disease rotting their bodies. This was it. This was the amaranth's last great creation. The embodiment of history, millennia of human experience compressed into one tiny space.

History was a slave ship.

She moved faster, trying to reach the end of the hold before the smell made her sick; but the hold had no end. There were more shelves, hundreds upon hundreds of bodies stacked on top of them. Roz ran past Indians and Orientals, listening to the pleas of people from nations she'd never even heard of.

Eventually she reached the section where they kept the white slaves. Slaves to time. Philosophers and barbarians. Every so often, she'd recognize a face, blank-eyed in the gloom. Samuel Lincoln. Isaac Penley. Fenn Martle (yeah, like you didn't see *that* one coming). Victims of the Watchmaker universe, and no, she had no idea where the thought had come from.

MOST MURDERS ARE COMMITTED BY SOMEONE

YOU KNOW.

YES. HIS NAME'S THE DOCTOR.

The silver shape-changing robot was chained to the wall with the rest of them, a million slaves rolled into one. And why did the Doctor need companions, anyway, if they were just going to get bruised or snuffed out? She remembered Justine (she'd be in the hold somewhere), who'd been convinced that the Doctor was an all-powerful sorcerer, while Roz thought he was just (just?) an alien time-traveller. Maybe he wasn't anything, until someone thought about him in a certain way, and told him how to act. Maybe that was why he needed dumb humans around him. Without them, he might as well not exist. He'd be a tree falling in a forest with no one to hear it.

She stopped. There was somebody standing in front of her in the hold. A figure in silver, a neuronic whip in her hand.

The other Roz Forrester. Forrester the Adjudicator. The one who enforced the rules that history's slave-masters made.

Agent of the Empire.

The other Roz Forrester began to execute the slaves, one by one. Starting with the aliens, naturally.

'I had to SAVE the worLd,' insisted Catcher. 'ProteCCCt it frOm the DARK the DARK FORCES of ChAoS. You caXXn see that, can't you? You can SEEEEEEE that?'

The Doctor's expression was halfway between concern and pity, as if he didn't know whether to sympathize with Catcher or not.

'Look what you've done to the poor man,' he said to the thing on the screen.

– Doctor, Doctor, Doctor, Doctor, Doctor. Do you take me for a schemer and a user? Do you take me for a Watchmaker?

He did this to himself. I don't control Matheson Catcher, and I never have. I don't control anyone or anything.

'OrDO iDo oRRRRRRRRRRRdo,' protested Catcher.

– Well, I may have whispered the odd sweet nothing into his ear. But he was damned to his fate long before I ever noticed him. It's this terrible age he's living in, *n'est-ce pas*?

Torn apart by history. A man of his era.

‘Where does he get his dreams from?’ The Doctor was pacing now, hands folded neatly behind his back. ‘Clockwork gods and wind-up worlds. Fairy-tales of yours?’

– No. I can’t explain his fantasies, and I don’t try to.

Perhaps all the children of this clockwork universe know about the Watchmakers, deep down in their hearts. Or perhaps there isn’t an explanation at all. Wouldn’t that be fun?

Catcher started scratching at his arms. Scratching at things that weren’t there. ‘YoU are not NOT NOT the Wa the Wa the WatchmakKers. There ARE no Watchmakers there ARE NO

WATCHMAKERS THERE ARE NO WATCHMAKERS

THERE ARE NO WATCHMAKERS.’

– Oh, don’t be silly. Of course there are Watchmakers.

Why, there’s one standing right next to –

‘Enough of this,’ said the Doctor. His voice was irritated.

Not afraid, not worried, just irritated. ‘You’ve done enough damage. What is it that you want?’

– I want my universe back.

Even the Doctor looked surprised at that.

– That’s all, Doctor. I want every thinking creature to know how it feels to exist in a world without definitions. To live in paradise without reasons or restrictions. An end to history. An end to certainty. Is that too much to ask?

The Doctor just scowled. ‘This ends,’ he said. ‘This ends here. I’ll do everything in my power to stop you.’

– Really? Why?

There was an awkward pause.

– Ahh. Silence from Time’s Champion, silence from Fate’s Accomplice. No comment, says the Traveller from Beyond Time.

‘This ends,’ the Doctor repeated, and pressed a switch on the console.

The screen went black, and the room was quiet again, except for the gentle hum of the ship's life-force.

'Doctor?' said Catcher.

'Hmmm?'

'I haVE to aSk you some?thing.'

'Yes?'

'HoW did YYYou get OUT of the counCil mEEting-hALL?'

The Doctor scowled again.

'Don't ask awkward questions,' he said.

Raphael crawled along haunted alleyways, the rain drumming alien tattoos against his skin. He'd tried looking for cover, but the storm kept washing the cover away. He looked down at his hand, and saw unimaginable things crawling under the skin, getting ready to break free of his flesh.

The room. Remember the lead-walled room. Watch the machine. Your name is Raphael. Forget any other name. Purge yourself of any other purpose. Purge me. Purge me; burn away the terrible absurdity that I am becoming. Oh, masters! I am impure. I am *caillou*.

The room. Lessons taught by Professor Hulot of Orléans.

Funny little red-haired man. Chief Scientific Advisor to the Shadow Directory, they called him, or *Monsieur Songe-Creux*, behind his back. Oh, Professor, I should have listened after all.

They move through dimensions of chance that you and I can never see, these monsters. How can any rational being stand against the *caillou*? How could we ever have thought to fight them?

The scalpel twisted in his arm. Please. Purge me. Give me sane and mortal flesh, not this parody of form. Let me wear a new shape...

The ground rippled around him, the earth lapping at his hands and at his knees as the irrational planet heard his prayers, and answered them. The mud of Hazelrow Avenue poured into the wound in his arm, stayed there, and hardened.

New bones and muscles were formed. The world gifted him with new

substance and a new shape. Raphael's wish came true.

Roslyn Sarah Forrester drew her flenser, and pointed the snout at Roslyn Inyathi Forrester. She switched on the laser targeting module. A tiny blue spot of light appeared on the victim's chest, exactly where the heart was supposed to be.

'Even I can't miss like this,' Roz the Adjudicator grinned.

Roz the victim looked down. 'I wouldn't dare.'

'Yes I would.'

'Not you. Me.' Roz the victim met her executioner's gaze.

'Back in my own time, back when I was you, I thought I was fair. One of the *good* cops.'

Roz the Adjudicator snorted. 'You were part of the system.

What's fair got to do with anything? Anyway, I seem to remember being pretty selective about who "fairness" applied to –'

'Just shut up and shoot, okay?'

Roz the Adjudicator looked surprised. 'You want me to kill you, all of a sudden?'

'No. Look, I don't believe in any of this heroics bullshit.

I've seen it a million times on simcord. The hero nobly gives his life away in the name of a greater good. Sod that. I want to live. *Life* is a greater good.'

'Ahhhh. That's sweet.'

'Shut it. What I'm saying is, I don't want to die. I don't want to be part of that self-sacrifice thing. But if you kill me now, at least I can say I tried. I wanted to live. I wanted to *live*.

And even when I died, I died a better death than you would've done.'

She closed her eyes. She didn't have a blindfold.

'Martyrdom is a happy ending,' Roz the victim concluded, muttering it under her breath.

‘Fair enough,’ said Roz the Adjudicator. ‘Bye, then.’

– and there was the sudden, unexpected sound of fist against skull. Roz the victim opened her eyes, and there was a mass of flailing limbs on the floor in front of her. Roz the Adjudicator was down, the gun by her side. Daniel Tremayne was on top of her. Roz imagined him running out of the darkness of the hold, swinging his arms wildly, jumping onto the Adjudicator at – yep – precisely the right moment.

Calmly, Roslyn Inyathi Forrester picked up the flenser.

‘Daniel,’ she said. ‘Stand up. Move away.’

Daniel’s fists stopped pounding. The woman in the silver suit sprang to her feet, made a lunge for the flenser...

Too late, of course. Roz the victim lined the blue dot up against the woman’s heart, and pushed the trigger-stud. The energy wave hit its target, stripping the plastic coating from the chest and working outwards, tearing away the suit, fibre by fibre. Roz’s finger stayed on the stud. The gun carefully removed the top few layers of the skin, then started untying the muscles and the sinews, gently pulling apart the nervous system.

Roslyn Sarah Forrester became a random stream of atoms in the darkness of the hold. Roz – the only Roz that existed, now – threw the gun away and looked at Daniel. He nodded solemnly.

‘I just saved your life again, didn’t I?’ he said.

‘Yup,’ said Roz.

‘Good.’

He took her hand, and they walked out of the darkness of the hold together.

‘Welcome back,’ said the Doctor.

Roz opened her eyes. In that first split-second, she thought she could see tiny particle-sized machines whirling around her head, shining miniscule flashlights in her face. The same feeling she got every time she woke up in the TARDIS, in fact. The TARDIS? That meant she was back...

... home?

She pulled herself to her feet. Daniel was standing beside her in the console room, and – thankfully – didn't seem at all phased by the ship's interior. Roz wondered what had happened to him. He was looking up to the scanner, where unlikely shadows were stalking the streets of Woodwicke. The Doctor was standing over the console, his fingers performing an elaborate ballet over a touchpad.

'What's *he* doing here?' Roz demanded, pointing at Catcher.

'AK,' said Catcher, trying to sink into the corner.

'Hmmm?' The Doctor let his ballet continue. 'Oh, don't worry about Mr Catcher. He won't give us any trouble.'

'Ak. C1. CLEA!N CLEAN it. IT! Up,' agreed Catcher.

'Great. How did we get here?' She glanced up at the scanner. ' "Here" being a suspect term, right now.'

'I called the amaranth home. It took you a while to arrive, though. Been busy?' Roz looked down at the amaranth, lying still in her pouch. Here in the TARDIS, it seemed quite content. 'And for the moment, we're still in Woodwicke.

Although "Woodwicke" is an even more suspect term. Are you familiar with catastrophe theory?'

'Probably not. Is it important?'

'An obsolete product of human scientific theory. Put simply, "things just blow up in your face". One event is enough to collapse an entire system. Amazing how easy it is to make everything fall apart.'

Roz indicated the screen. 'Let me guess. Whoever's controlling the gynoids is causing that, am I close?'

'I could question your use of the word "controlling". But otherwise, a succinct and accurate assessment.'

'And, presumably, we have to stop them.'

The Doctor paused, his fingers freezing in mid-pirouette.

'We do,' he said, but to Roz it sounded like he'd said 'do we?', like he wasn't sure how he should be behaving any more.

His fingers began moving again. 'Of course we do,' he mumbled.

‘Responsibilities. History must be protected.

Everything must be put back in place. All in a day’s work for Time’s Champion.’

Roz felt herself flinch, and remembered the slave-ship.

Time’s Champion. Suddenly the idea didn’t seem reassuring, and even the Doctor had said it through gritted teeth.

‘Now,’ he announced, suddenly cheery. ‘If the trachoid crystal contrafibulations are in synchronic resonance with the referential difference index, then this should take us right to the heart of the trouble. And they don’t make sentences like that any more. Everybody ready?’

Then he looked up, and seemed to notice Daniel for the first time.

‘Ah,’ he said. ‘I don’t think we –’

‘Is that Woodwicke?’ asked Daniel, pointing at the scanner.

The Doctor squinted at him. Roz got the impression that there was something about the boy he recognized. ‘Yes.

What’s left of it.’

Daniel smiled. It was the same grin he’d given Roz the first time they’d met, when he’d been waiting for her on the stoop of her house. Correction. It wasn’t her house any more, not now she was back in the TARDIS. Not now she was back home.

Home?

‘Responsibilities,’ said Daniel.

Christopher Cwej hadn’t really meant to do anything. He’d just let himself drift off into a kind of half-sleep, a state where he wasn’t sure whether he was one thing or another, in this world or the next, and where was the Doctor now and did it matter and what about the TARDIS and where have all the flowers gone and where do you go to my lovely when you’re alone in your bed...

Then he’d looked up, and there’d been a city looming over him. Or was it an un-city? He could imagine the gynoids living in the whispering tower-blocks, poking their hollow heads out of the cracks and the orifices. It was like an Overcity, with huge buildings

supported by spiralling columns, but the logic of it seemed to have been surgically removed.

'Did I do all that?' he asked.

There was no answer. He looked around. The Carnival Queen was gone. Chris vaguely remembered her voice, telling him something while he'd been half-awake, something about having to see a man about a god, which was apparently an old Watchmaker joke. So, he was alone. Apart from the gynoids, of course, lurking on the edges of his vision, as if they were amazed that anyone could exist with a stable number of limbs in the way that he did, and wanted to keep an eye on him.

Alone? He could do all of this... alone?

Christopher Cwej found himself suddenly and unexpectedly excited. He closed his eyes and let himself dream again.

When the TARDIS had taken off – Roz still thought of it as

'taking off, despite having suffered a year of the Doctor shouting 'dematerialize!' at her – it hadn't made the usual noises. The wheezing rhythm had still been there, but the sound had been turned on its side, as if the ship were scuttling around the edges of the vortex instead of wading right through it. It had still landed with the usual *whump*, though.

Daniel was no longer aboard the ship. He'd wanted to stay in Woodwicke. Insisted on it, in fact. At first, Roz had thought he'd just wanted to get out of the TARDIS, or get away from Catcher, or get back to skulking in the cracks of the world he knew, but as he'd spoken to the Doctor, Roz had begun to understand. The way he was talking, it was like he thought he had a *duty* to be there.

In fact, Roz was sure she'd detected something unusual in the way that Daniel and the Doctor had talked. Some deep understanding, even though they'd never met before. Finally, and alarmingly, the Doctor had given Daniel the amaranth.

Just given it away, like it was a Christmas present.

Now Roz looked up at the scanner, watching the new world outside the TARDIS. A dark sun in the sky, sand the same colour as the ghost-space under a five-year-old's bed. In the corner, Catcher opened his mouth to say something, but all he could manage was a series of

disconnected clicking noises. If the sounds had been arranged into the right order, they might have made a message about being damned and sent to rationalists' Hell.

'I've been here before,' said Roz.

The Doctor nodded. 'But you only visited the suburbs. And this is the heartland.'

A figure stepped into view on the scanner, strolling casually across the dunes towards the TARDIS. The shape was feminine, Roz could tell that much, but the face was vague.

She got the impression that the scanner couldn't get a proper fix on the features, and was filling the screen with fuzzy random pixels to make up for it.

Before Roz could even ask what was happening, the Doctor was heading for the door, stepping over a sofa that looked like it had belonged to Napoleon III.

'Stay here,' he said over his shoulder.

Roz pointed at Catcher. 'With him?'

'XXPuniS?hed,' said Catcher.

'Would you rather come outside?' said the Doctor.

'Rrrrrrrr,' growled Roz. The Time Lord stepped out through the doors.

## 12

## Infinity, Shut Up

Outside the TARDIS, the Carnival Queen was kicking at pebbles in the sand, and obviously having trouble with Marielle Duquesne's shoes.

– Spiked heels, she murmured. – Now I remember why I invented chukka boots.

'I've come to reason with you,' said the Doctor.

– You mean, you've come to talk Reason to me? The Carnival Queen looked vaguely disappointed, and put her hands over her ears. – I can't hear you. Blah, blah, blah. Can't hear you can't hear you can't hear you.

‘Stop it,’ said the Doctor.

She smiled, and turned towards the far horizon, taking her hands away from her ears and using them to shade her eyes. If the word ‘shade’ meant anything in a place that was made out of shadows.

– Impressive, isn’t it?

The Doctor followed her gaze. Framed against the black sun in the distance was the outline of what looked a city, built on huge cylindrical legs. The glowing shadow of the city slid uncomfortably across the desert as the sun began to set.

‘Hardly in keeping with the environment,’ mused the Doctor. ‘A city? You could almost call it rational.’

– Almost. The un-architect hasn’t quite got the idea yet.

The Doctor narrowed his eyes. ‘Chris.’

– And Chris is just the first of many, *naturellement*. The first born-again child of the new world disorder.

‘Please,’ said the Doctor. "Think about what you’re doing.

Think about the consequences.’

– Consequences aren’t my concern. I’m a magician, not a Doctor.

‘People are suffering.’ The Doctor’s voice sounded more irritated than angry. ‘Look at the town. The walls are falling.

The children are screaming. People are living in fear...’

– ... except for the ones who are starting to enjoy it. The Carnival begins again. Laughter and tears. *C’est la vie*.

‘History will be destroyed,’ insisted the Doctor.

– History. The word was hollow in the Carnival Queen’s mouth. – You tell me that people are suffering, then you try to defend history? If history was left to rule the world, how many of those people in the town would it kill? How much more horror would there be, and how long would the screaming last? Stop me, and the witches burn all over again. Stop me, and whole planets die by nuclear fire and atomic politics. You pretend to be the spanner in the works, Doctor, but you’re as much a part of the machine as the dictators and the

bureaucrats. Part of the killing clockwork.

'I have a responsibility,' the Doctor insisted. It must have been strange for him, being accused of rationality in the first degree. After all, at least one major galactic power had wanted to get its cybernetic hands on him just because it thought he was entirely *ir* rational.

– Ah. Time's Champion speaks. The man who refuses to interfere with history, unless ordered to by his superiors. Do you know the things they put into your DNA, Doctor, when you were born from the loom? Killing lessons that would even put the Shadow Directory to shame, woven right into your genes. Every Watchmaker is a walking weapon, designed to kill off Cacophony wherever I show my face. Don't pretend you have a choice. You have to fight me. It's in your blood.

'A responsibility.' His voice was high-pitched, pleading.

'Do you understand what that means?'

– No.

The Doctor took a deep breath. Anyone watching him would have thought that he had something vital to say, but that he'd never said it before, perhaps never even thought about it.

At least not consciously.

'Listen to me,' he said. 'I've toppled dictatorships, I've duelled with tyrants, I've arm-wrestled with the agents of pain and fury. I've fought ruthless militant jellyfish, murderous pot-plants, insane giant prawns, world-conquering crabs, killer confectionary, octopi with delusions of godhood, forces of destruction of every conceivable size and shape. I've done so much. Saved entire races whose names I can't even remember.

And why? Because of *reasons*. Because of principles. Truth, love, and harmony. Peace and goodwill. The best of intentions.

'Whatever I've done, I've done for these reasons. And there's been a price to pay. Sacrifices. People close to me have died. Four of my companions, hundreds of the universe's supporting cast. I could fill whole volumes with their names.

Bystanders who helped me, perhaps for just a moment or two, and suffered for it. I've died myself, six times over.

‘I have a responsibility. To every one of them, the living as well as the dead. If I let you succeed, if I let you make a world without reasons, then every sacrifice they’ve ever made in my name would be for nothing. They would have suffered, and died, and triumphed... all for no purpose.’

There was a moment’s silence.

‘That’s all,’ the Doctor concluded.

And the Carnival Queen just nodded.

– Then your own reasons have damned you. You’re as trapped as I am. You’ll always be a Watchmaker.

The Doctor pointed towards the un-city with the tip of his cane. ‘Chris is over there?’

– Naturally.

‘Good.’ He began the long walk across the desert, leaving the altered shape of Marielle Duquesne behind him. ‘Then let’s get this over with.’

*Cardinal Catilin was just completing the new inventory of the Collection of Necessary Secrets when the commotion began.*

*There was an unfamiliar sound from the hall where the great reptile bones were held, rattling things slamming themselves against the walls. Catilin hurriedly unlocked the doors, convinced that the ever-zealous Cardinal Tuscanini was venting his anger on the ‘unholy relics’ again.*

*When he saw that it was the reptiles themselves making the noise – the skeletons climbing out of their glass cases, the fossils unpinning themselves from the walls, the lizards walking upright like men – he immediately lost a sizeable portion of his sanity. However, when the creatures began crawling towards him, asking him to hear their confessions and begging God to forgive them their sins, the Cardinal could do nothing else but go entirely mad.*

They had done everything they could. The townsfolk had been evacuated from Burr Street, and dozens of people had been escorted to the outskirts of the town; a mass exodus, in a place the size of Woodwicke. Rain-sodden families with bawling children, confused and frightened as they’d been forced out of their neighbourhoods. A few members of the Renewal Society had formed a kind of military-style escort, brandishing flaming torches to hold back the wolf-headed

things that were rumoured to be at large in the woodlands.

The remaining members of the Society – the core of the group, Erskine Morris among them – had been on Eastern Walk when the Corpse Children had arrived, picking through the smoking (and, in some cases, melting) ruins, looking for any of the wounded who might have been trapped under the rubble. None of the men had seen where the first of the monstrosities had come from, but now the damned things were crawling out of the woodwork on all sides. Literally, crawling out of the woodwork. Like huge beetles, cowled by thick black shells that clicked and clacked as they moved.

They were surrounded. Erskine wasn't in the least bit surprised. Half a dozen or so men, trapped by a circle of damnable shell-backed horrors, waved burning sticks in futile gestures of defiance. Erskine saw Walter Monroe, his fat face lit by torchlight, grumbling at the monsters as if they were inefficient store-tenders.

'Surrender,' the Corpse Children buzzed, grinding their mismatched teeth together with a *crunch-crunch-crunch*.

'Give up what you believe. Surrender.'

They had done everything they could.

He was missing his umbrella again. It would have kept the cold sun off his back, and shaded his eyes from the black lightning. He would have been able to flap it around a bit, too, and that might have scared off the gynoids. They were jabbering around him, diving in and out of the ground in a way that reminded the Doctor of frolicking dolphins. Some of them gurned at him in five dimensions.

Not just gynoids, he noted. Other things were lurking behind the dunes now, waiting for their moment to come.

Blank-eyed machine people and monsters with eye-stalks. If history was wiped away, these might be the things that replaced the Daleks and the Cybermen and the Quarks and the Sontarans, new predators for an irrational universe. Not that the Cybermen were particularly rational in the first place, thought the Doctor. Creatures from Earth's twin planet, sucked out of its orbit and left to wander the universe... scientifically dubious, to say the least. A futurist fairy-tale. Then there was that gold allergy, and their aversion to plastic solvents. Gold bullets instead of silver ones, chemical cocktails instead of holy water. Cryogenic freezers instead of coffins. The Doctor briefly wondered what irrational forces might have been at work on Mondas, all those

years ago.

And the Daleks? He remembered the research papers he'd seen in the vid-archives on Riften-5 when he'd been taller and blonder, genetic tests that had been run on captured Dalek specimens after their 'War of Sharpened Hearts'. When the Kaled mutants had been scooped out of their metal shells and examined, it had turned out that every single one had been grown from male tissue. What had Davros done with the female survivors of the Kaled race, the Doctor wondered?

Experimented on them'? Crashed their chromosomes together to see what kind of noise they made? He imagined them being probed, dissected, and cast aside. 'Not suitable,' Davros would no doubt have said, in that nasty little croak of his. 'Minimal desire for conquest. Inferior genetic stock. Of no value to the Dalek race.'

Stop me, the thing that called itself the Carnival Queen had said, and the witches burn all over again... The Doctor grimaced and kept walking, muttering mantras of faith and determination, trying to ignore the giggling of the gynoids.

*In China, the trickster-god No Cha descended from his house-outside-of-time and challenged Emperor Yung-Yen to a game of dice, with the accumulated souls of his ancestors as the stake. In France, the gargoyles of Notre Dame revealed themselves to be the Lords of Misrule, and began hurling rocks at Parisians on the streets below, pausing only to rip the throats out of passing pigeons. Across Eastern Europe, fresh graves opened, the Nosferatu returning from the silent lands to dance with their families one more time. The dead had carnival celebrations of their own.*

The Corpse Children were close enough to touch, close enough to smell. Erskine realized, as the nearest of the bastard monsters lurched towards him, that their skins were made from the wings of dead beetles, stitched together like patchwork quilts.

He considered closing his eyes and waiting for the end, but every time he brought down his drooping lids, he saw the same thing; the eyes of the little scientist – sod it, the little magician – called the Doctor. Asking him that one simple question, over and over again.

Erskine stared into the insectoid face of death.

'Bugger off,' he told it.

Even as he said it, he became aware of a sudden calm along the street. The Renewalists were standing like statues, blinking in the torchlight,

trying to make out what was happening.

Erskine thought he detected a sound on the very brink of his hearing, high-pitched and strangely comforting. He could almost have believed that the Corpse Children were listening to it as well, heads cocked attentively, their mandible-teeth twitching to an unfamiliar rhythm.

Suddenly there were no monsters. There were just empty sacks of mud and insect skin, splitting open and falling to the ground. The last of the Corpse Children twitched in the dirt, legs up in the air, carapace turning to powder.

Somebody stepped into the torchlight from the direction of Eastern Walk. A boy, seventeen, maybe eighteen. Clothes torn. Slashed by tendrils of mud and madness. There was a metal sphere nestling in his hands, and at first Erskine thought that it was the sphere making the sound, singing as it spun; but it was the boy who made the noise, and the globe was just his tool. His instrument.

Erskine suddenly realized where he'd seen the object before.

'I don't like this future much,' said the boy. 'Let's make a new one.'

The un-city loomed over him The Doctor walked on, occasionally fabricating tiny little duplicates of himself from the raw matter of the desert to chase the gynoids away. Shango the lightning god ran in ever-decreasing circles of logic with Tsuro the Hare. Dr John Smith swapped jokes with a three-inch-high version of the *Ka Faraq Gatri*. The Valeyard was sulking because no one wanted to talk to him.

A pygmy-sized copy of his sixth self was running around his legs, kicking his shins He didn't remember creating it, but then a subconscious was a dangerous thing once it was riled.

For God's sake, the teeny sixth Doctor squeaked, how many more of us are you going to have to kill before you're happy?

Eventually he reached the gates of the un-city. A gigantic shadow guarded the entrance.

'Good morning,' the Doctor said, raising his hat politely.

'I'm collecting on behalf of the Watchmakers' Retirement Home. Would you care to make a donation?'

*Hsssssssssss*, said the big sister of all gynoids.

He sighed, and let his consciousness seep out into the ground. BUT I AM. He imposed his will on the desert, resisting the temptation to relax and let his concentration slip away. NOT. Soon, hard lines were scratching themselves into the sands. I AM NOT. Pure angles were intersecting. A WATCHMAKER.

The android tore its way out of the darkness and into existence. A true android, the Doctor reminded himself; not just a simple machine of positronic circuits and mechanical parts, not like those awful robots the Lamerdines and the humans and the Banjaxi made. It had no shape, because it *was* shape. A creature of absolute order. Geometry incarnate.

Even the Doctor was impressed by the size of the thing.

The android and the gynoid were at each other's throats in seconds, each tearing chunks out of the other, but neither ever coming any closer to winning the fight. Like the lion and the unicorn, thought the Doctor. Or like yin and yang. The android was familiar with every rule of combat, while the gynoid made up its own rules as it went along.

The Doctor tipped his hat to them and passed through the gate. 'I'll let myself in,' he said. 'I can see you're busy.'

The streets of the un-city shifted like the nonsense circuitry of the gynoids themselves, but it didn't take long to find Christopher Cwej at the heart of it all. The pathways arranged themselves into regular patterns as the Doctor passed by, almost as if they were scared of what he might do to them if they didn't comply. Chris was sitting cross-legged on a node of shadow-matter that didn't look altogether unlike a giant bean-bag, staring with wide eyes at the claw-like pylons and minarets that were sprouting up around him. The Doctor cleared his throat. Chris blinked twice and met his gaze.

'Oh,' said Chris. 'Hi.'

'I've come to rescue you,' said the Doctor, nonchalantly.

– And what makes you think he needs rescuing? said a voice from up above. The Doctor frowned. Chris looked up.

The Carnival Queen was with them. Not the interface of the Carnival Queen, not the possessed body of Marielle Duquesne, but the Queen herself, growing out of the shadowy sky like a polyp, hovering overhead as if poised to swallow the un-city, faceless and unmeasurable and big enough to blot out the sun.

*Earth, of course, wasn't big enough to contain all the possibilities. A few emerged on Venus, where the wind sang a funeral lament for a lost civilization, the song becoming a living, chuckling thing that looked for a new home amongst the stars. On Mars, the red sands parted to make way for canals of purest springwater, platinum fish swimming in the cracked helmets of long-dead warriors. More than four light-years away, on the seventh planet of the Alpha Centauri system, the thirty-six-legged demon Trama-Tayn-Ku-Ku-Ro sprang from its ancient tomb, and it rained liquid copper across an entire continent.*

The form – the silhouette – the thing – that hung there in the sky was every shape that could possibly exist, plus twice as many that couldn't. She's a window, thought Chris, and however stupid it sounded, it was the only thing he could think of. The Carnival Queen was a window, and everything strange, dark and unimaginable was there on the other side.

Chris had never been religious – not since Jallafillia, anyway –

but he knew, at a glance, that this was the thing which priests were terrified of, the thing which lurked in the darkness behind every school of faith and philosophy. Creation's shadow.

– But there are as many Devils as there are stories of Devils, as there are people to be afraid of Devils. The Carnival Queen was laughing, yes she was, yes I am. And am I the bringer of despair, the harbinger of doom, the creator of machiavellian evils? *Non*. Am I the fallen angel, Heaven's first rebel, the one God weeps for in the middle of the night?

*Non*. Am I the serpent in paradise? *Non*. Am I the voice of the jungle, the one who dances in the cracks of the clockwork...?

Chris was sure the Carnival Queen blushed.

– Well, maybe.

'Pepperoni and balderdash!' exclaimed the Doctor, dramatically. 'Your claims are nonsensical, and your stories are riddled with contradictions.'

– I *like* contradictions.

Chris levered his attention away from the Carnival Queen and focused on the Doctor. 'Listen to me, Chris. Nothing she's told you is true. Nothing she's told you makes any sense.'

Chris wondered how the Doctor knew what the Carnival Queen had told him, but he didn't press the point. 'She's a phantom. She has no place in this universe. She's a refugee from a lost continuum, a leftover from another time, summoned by psionic resonances between the material world of the eighteenth century and the non-linear matrices that exist on the periphery of the vortex. That's all.'

Chris frowned. So did the Doctor. Somehow, the Time Lord didn't sound as if he'd been convinced by his own words.

– He's making this up, said the Carnival Queen. None of that made scientific sense. It just *sounded* scientific. Typical Watchmaker trick. If you want to save the day, Doctor, why don't you just reverse the polarity of the –

'Enough!' snapped the Doctor.

– You see? Space monsters he can handle, but anything outside his own little clockwork universe... it's all Daleks inside that brain of his. Daleks gliding up and down corridors, Daleks coming out of rivers, Daleks burning down jungles...

'Enough,' repeated the Doctor.

-... invisible Daleks, Daleks from parallel universes...

'I warn you now –'

– ... Daleks being pushed out of windows...

'I've already told you my reasons,' the Doctor fumed, and Chris wondered what he meant by that. 'The universe has decided on its path. You have no right to do this. You have no right to change any of it.'

– Decided? The Watchmakers are hardly democratic. The

'universe' never decided. Christopher never 'decided'. Look.

All this... and she gestured towards the curious majesty of the un-city, though it wasn't entirely clear what kind of limb she was gesturing with... – all this is his.

The Doctor whirled around to face Chris. Who blushed.

'Sorry,' he said, looking away guiltily.

The Doctor's fingers drummed the silver handle of his cane. He looked up at the Carnival Queen again, staring straight into the centre of her ever-changing body. Chris wondered how he could do that without his head hurting.

'Very well,' the Doctor said. 'I'm sure we can reach an agreement.'

– Agreement? And the Carnival Queen's voice was amused as much as it was suspicious.

'You claim that given the choice, the people of the universe will choose your way instead of mi... instead of the way things are. True?'

– If they understand what the choice is.

'And Chris understands?'

'Er,' said Chris.

– Yes, yes. She sounded impatient. – Chris has already made his choice. I told you.

'Er, well,' said Chris. 'I wouldn't say I'd made a choice. I just... you know... let things happen.'

The Doctor looked smug. 'There, you see?'

– What are you suggesting, Doctor?

'One question. We ask Christopher one question. If he sides with you, the irrational universe is yours. I won't interfere. If he sides with me...'

– Ah, don't be too confident. He's seen so much since he came here. Enough to change the shape of his whole life. If you're counting on his loyalty to you...

'Then you accept the suggestion?'

– Life would be much less interesting if I didn't.

'Just a minute,' said Chris, suddenly irked. 'You're trying to guess what my answer's going to be, and I don't even know what the two of you are talking about. What question?'

All eyes turned on him. Two of the Doctor's, an infinite number of the Carnival Queen's (and she had an infinite number more to spare).

‘Who do you trust?’ asked the Doctor. ‘Me or her?’

Chris looked at him as if he were mad. Then he looked at the Carnival Queen as if she were mad. He wasn’t sure which of them made his head hurt more.

‘Hang on,’ he said. ‘Are you telling me that what I say now is going to change the whole history of the universe?’

The Doctor smiled weakly. ‘Not exactly,’ he said. ‘What you say now will decide whether there *is* such a thing as history.’

Chris went white.

‘Right,’ he squeaked.

*Aeons in the past, on a planet very near the centre of the galaxy, ancient automatic defence systems spontaneously activated themselves, and around the Capitol six hundred Time Lords simultaneously claimed to be possessed by the ghost of Morbius. In her office, the Lady President experienced an unexpected epileptic fit, during which she signed an order for three hundred prisoners to be released from a prison asteroid. Dragon tattoos snapped like flytraps on the arms of the convicts as they stepped out of stasis, and leading them was the ‘voodoo priest of the House of Lungbarrow’, the one they called Grandfather Paradox, who –*

*according to popular fable – had only escaped execution because everyone was more afraid of him dead than alive. An embryo in one of the gene-looms began scratching the blueprints of a demat-gun into the semiotic fluid that surrounded it. Murder was etched across the face of the planet. The Eye of Harmony winked.*

‘Chris?’

Trust. Trust, that was the thing. What had his parents told him about trust? Or was it something about a frisbee? No, forget that. This was real life. Did he trust the Doctor? Of course he trusted the Doctor. The Doctor always did the right thing. The Doctor had saved his life hundreds of times, but then again, it had always been the Doctor who’d got him into trouble in the first place. Was that how Reason worked?

Correction. The Doctor did the right thing *eventually*.

Sacrifices along the way. Detrios. Sheol, Detrios. ‘You’re a liar and a user and quite possibly a murderer…’

– Chris?

The Carnival Queen. How long had he been here? Just an hour? Less? Time, no longer an important factor. Was that the real difference between her and the Doctor? Chris hardly knew her. Couldn't know her. She was a vast and incomprehensible alien intelligence, yeah? Yeah, right. Like the Doctor wasn't.

Her face. Marielle's face. She'd shown him how to let the gynoids happen, and while his consciousness had been there, nestling under the sand, something had gone pop and the world couldn't ever be the same again. Even the Doctor hadn't seen the universe the way he was seeing it, right? That was it.

That was why he didn't automatically trust the Doctor this time. Because the Doctor just didn't *know*.

'It's all right, Chris. Concentrate.'

Concentration. Seeing the world through squinted eyes, like the Doctor saw it. History rolling along. Joy and pain.

Watching them building the concentration camps, watching them kill the red-headed children, because this was history and history must not be interfered with, no matter what. Even if people died (Kat'lanna died) and worlds were burned (Kat'lanna died) and the walls caved in (Kat'lanna died, probably), that was the way of the Doctor. He had his reasons.

He had his Reason.

– No, Chris. Don't concentrate. Remember how it feels.

How it feels just to feel.

And here he was, Christopher Rodonanté Cwej, out in the desert, between the Devil and the deep blue eyes of the Doctor (green eyes, grey eyes, any old eyes), ready to make the decision, ready to kill millions of people with history or throw the whole shebang into an eternal darkness that might have been bad, might have been good, might have been any number of things. Worlds full of pain, or worlds full of the unknown.

Which was worse?

'I…' he began.

Like a coin on its edge. Ready to fall either way. His senses flooded out through his feet, into the desert, and into the universe outdoors. There; down in America. The last battlefield. Woodwicke? Was that what its name had been?

'Chris...'

– Chris...

Warrior-monks were in close combat with the spawn of Baalzebub. Invisible monsters walked through dreams, and wolves walked like men. Balls of light with lips of flame, half-human automatons made from feathers and bones. Angels with rats' features, villages that sighed as if alive and lonely, gods with the heads of cats, cats with the heads of gods... and it stretched out across the cosmos, an infinity of new worlds, none of which could exist until he let them, except as shadowy possibilities in the darkness of not-being-sure...

'Christopher?'

– Christopher?

True darkness... monster darkness... not knowing whether to cover your eyes or open your arms and let it swallow you up. The thing that all children are terrified of. Watching *EarthDoom XV* from behind the sofa... when he'd been a kid...

just a kid .

The memory hit him like a warhead, a memory so large that it filled his head and leaked out into the world around him, writing itself on the shadows of the Carnival Queen's domain until everybody could see it.

*Whumf!* went the frisbee as it thumped the first robber's head, knocking him senseless. *Fwang!* it went as it rebounded off the man's skull, spinning into the legs of the second thug.

*Oopf!* he went as he fell onto the mezzacrete, and his gun clattered harmlessly out of his reach.

'Curses!' exclaimed the robber. 'Foiled again!'

– Oh, no, said the Carnival Queen. I think I'm going to be physically ill.

‘Yes, my boy, law and order is certainly in our blood,’ said Cwej Senior, and the walls of Young Christopher’s city began to cave in.

Daniel Tremayne looked up at a dark sky shot through with cold yellow light, and sang. The amaranth sang along with him. History turned in his grasp, and turned again, and turned again, and turned again.

Erskine Morris watched light and fire wash through the streets of Woodwicke, cauterizing the wounds in the world where the madness bled out onto the streets. By God, he thought, as the last of the phantoms turned to cinders. By God. By God.

The creature that had once been Isaac Penley saw the light crackle across the clouds, and in that one moment of illumination, he saw the future, and knew what it meant. For the first time in his adult life, there was a spark of understanding inside him. It was all so simple. So very very simple. What had he been so worried about?

Christopher Cwej didn’t know who to trust. He just knew this: that he wasn’t ready for the world of wonders, that he wasn’t ready for the chimeras and the moondust-eaters, the slithy toves and the faerie queens, the flying pigs and the magic apples and the imaginary friends. It was too big, too painful.

Too alien.

‘Law and order are in our blood...’

On the streets of Woodwicke, a hundred pairs of eyes were focusing on the heavens, a hundred mouths forming perfect O-shapes as the sky sealed itself up and the sheer darkness of Cacophony was replaced by the star-spangled darkness of just-past-one-o’clock-in-the-morning. The storm ended, and the streets began to dry.

The gynoids sank into the buildings, the buildings sank into the streets, the streets sank into the columns, and Christopher Cwej looked up. At some point, he saw the Carnival Queen’s endless eyes, and they were full of sadness and pity. At some point, he saw the Doctor’s eyes, and they were full of sadness and pity as well. He couldn’t remember which he’d seen first, or what they’d said to him as the un-city had collapsed back into the desert. He couldn’t even remember whether he’d been screaming or crying as he’d made the decision and answered the question.

The boy sat among the dunes, shivering. His eyes were wide open, as

if the eyelids had been pinned against his skull. The face of someone who's seen too much, thought the Doctor.

'It's over,' he told Chris.

Chris started clambering to his feet, his ankles shaking under his weight. The eyes remained resolutely open, staring off across the desert. The TARDIS was visible there, a blue rectangle embedded in one of the dunes.

'I made the decision,' Chris said. For a second, his voice sounded like Catcher's, fractured and twisted; but it was just nervous exhaustion, the Doctor realized, nothing permanent.

'Yes. You made the decision,' said the Doctor. And then, more quietly, 'Thank you.'

Chris nodded. Dumbly. He glanced up at the Carnival Queen, but he seemed to be looking right through her. Staring at nothing on the far side of everything. He nodded again, and began to take slow, stumbling steps towards the TARDIS.

'I made the decision,' he muttered as he walked away.

– Well. It was a nice idea.

The Doctor turned, his face angry. Then his eyes settled on the many potential faces of the Carnival Queen – and who could say how many of those faces he could see? – and the fury just blew away on the wind.

'I'm sorry,' he said.

– I know, said the Carnival Queen. – But if defeats really meant anything to me... if I could be disappointed, even after these billions of years... then I'd be a Watchmaker. These things happen... perhaps some other time...

'What will you do now?'

– Funny. You asked that automatically. Without thinking.

You ask that of everybody you leave behind, don't you?

'What will you do now?' the Doctor repeated.

– Oh, the usual things. Try to send a few more good ideas out into the

Majestic Clockwork. Influence. Inspire. Eke out an eternity.

'I'm sorry.'

– You said. Nicely manipulated, Doctor.

'Manipulated?' The Doctor watched Chris amble away over the dunes, becoming a stick-figure as he neared the TARDIS. 'No. Not this time. Chris made the decision himself.

It was all a question of trust.'

– Oh, really? And I suppose it's a coincidence that the memory of his father and the bank-robber should pop into his head at that precise moment? And such a sickly, sentimental memory, *non*?

The Doctor's body tensed up. Instinctively. 'What are you suggesting?'

– Doctor, you saw what he was remembering. A bank at...

where was it? The Shoptronic Mezzanine? His father throwing a robo-frisbee. 'Law and order are in our blood'. The credo of the Watchmakers.

The Doctor shook his head. 'I don't see...'

– Christopher comes from the thirtieth century. By his time, all financial transactions are performed by computer. That's my understanding, at least, though my knowledge of history is predictably shaky. Do I have to spell it out for you, Doctor?

There aren't any banks in the thirtieth century. And no bank-robbers. That memory was false. A fraud. A fake. When did you plant it, exactly?

The Doctor's expression was unreadable.

'I have to go,' he said, hurriedly. Then, once more, 'I'm sorry.'

And he darted off across the desert, following the footsteps of Christopher Cwej back towards the TARDIS.

Behind him, the Carnival Queen slowly shook a hundred thousand million billion heads. Sadly.

'Are you okay?' the Negress was asking.

Marielle Duquesne didn't recognize the room she found herself in, but she knew that she had to be back inside Christopher's miraculous time-ship. Everything was solid, though, no longer fuzzy at the edges. Her head was full of memories, but she couldn't arrange them into a coherent sequence; a restaurant in Paris, Christopher on the guillotine, a machine breaking open, the sensation of being part of something so much bigger –

'We dragged you in,' the Negress said. 'You were standing outside, and then you just fell over. Chris says you're okay now. Demonic possession or something.'

Marielle looked up. Christopher was there, leaning against a platform that she took to be the ship's helm. His eyes were empty and bloodshot.

'How are you?' he asked, mechanically.

'Well. Well, thank you.' Marielle wanted to tell him about her spine, about the fact that it had gone completely numb, that it seemed to have just given up and died... but she couldn't, of course.

'Ak. Cac. Watch,' croaked a prone figure on the other side of the room, but everyone ignored him

Then a man appeared at Christopher's shoulder. Marielle had never seen him before. He was the Doctor. She didn't even notice the contradiction between those last two thoughts.

'Chris,' the Doctor said. 'Listen to me. This may be very important. The memory you had, out in the desert. About your father. Where did it come from?'

'What?' Christopher's expression was blank. 'It's just... a memory. I don't know.'

The Doctor seemed agitated about something. 'Please, try to concentrate. When was the first time you had that memory?

The first time today, say.'

'Today.' Chris started to nod. 'I was in a room. In the TARDIS. With brass bits in the walls. And the interface.'

'Interface?'

‘The TARDIS interface. I was talking to the interface... and the memory came... for the first time...’

Suddenly the Doctor was on the other side of the room, vanishing through a doorway and into the depths of the ship.

The Negress looked at Chris, then at Marielle.

‘What was that all about?’ she asked.

The Doctor stormed past more nineteenth-century furniture in the corridors, but ignored it. As soon as he entered the room with the brass roundels, one of the walls opened up a lazy eye.

‘Interface!’ barked the Doctor.

‘Ah,’ said a mouth set into a brass roundel. ‘I did believe you to be unaware of my existence...’

‘Don’t insult my intelligence.’ He began to pace the room, hands behind his back. ‘Are you in touch with the TARDIS?’

‘I suspect that I am the TARDIS, in part. That is to say, the TARDIS has been employing me as a mouthpiece. And it bloody hurts, and all, as my new personality might put it. Do you know how big the ship’s psychosphere is...?’

The Doctor waved the complaint aside. ‘Ask her what she knows about False Memory Syndrome. Ask her what she thinks she’s doing putting memories into people’s heads.’

The mouth frowned. ‘Oh. I see.’

‘The Carn... the force out in the desert was right, for once.

Nobody as apparently well-adjusted as Christopher should have a memory like that rolling around inside him. Somebody planted it. Popped the memory into his cerebellum. Somebody with telepathic faculties. Or with telepathic *circuits*.’

‘You guessed, then.’

‘It wasn’t difficult,’ the Doctor scowled. ‘And the historical slip was clumsy. Bank-robbers in the thirtieth century?

Pitiful!’

‘Please, don’t blame the TARDIS for that. The historical records in the data banks were made by – excuse me – by a bunch of doddery old Time Lords with their heads stuck halfway up their... whatever it is Time Lords have at the bottom end. Funny, the data banks don’t talk about Time Lord anatomy much.’ The voice was swinging uncertainly between its usual cultured tones and a rough London accent, as if it had two personalities and wasn’t sure which it should be using.

‘Though I fail to understand why you’re angry. We saved the universe, surely?’

‘The TARDIS has no right to play with the minds of its passengers!’

‘No?’ The mouth twitched at the corner. ‘Please, Doctor, consider the situation. The "force" in the desert, as you describe it, wanted to create an irrational universe. Yes?’

‘Yes, yes.’

‘And who has the most to lose from that? Consider what the TARDIS represents. The ship is the ultimate expression of reason. Its heart is made of mathematics, its architecture the very model of order.’

The mouth tried to shake its head, with predictably disastrous results. ‘I... it... couldn’t take any chances. It couldn’t allow the rational universe to be threatened. Besides which, any personality the TARDIS might have developed has largely been modelled on your own. To put it bluntly, if you’re an interfering old stoat, it’s not surprising that the ship is as well.’

The Doctor stopped pacing and pulled a face. ‘I’ll thank you not to lecture me about how the TARDIS works.’

‘Why? I must surely have a better idea than you do...

‘Hah!’ exclaimed the Doctor. ‘Interface, I command you to shut down. Priority deactivation code Theta-Sigma-74384338.’

‘Deactivation code?’ The eye looked alarmed as the roundel sealed up over it, and the mouth quivered as it shrank.

‘I wasn’t aware that you could do tha–’

And then the Doctor was alone in the room. There was a pause, during which an entire galaxy-spanning civilization rose and fell within the universe-in-a-bottle that sat in the corner.

Then he looked up, towards the ceiling, as if some kind of god were watching him from up above. The anger drained gut of his features. A smile began to blossom in its place.

'Everybody was so busy arguing about the Watchmakers, they forgot to ask the opinion of the Watch,' he mused.

He reached out, felt the warmth of the nearest wall, patted it affectionately. *Any personality the TARDIS might have developed...*

The smile burst into full bloom. 'I saved the day again,' he said. 'Or at least, part of me did.' And with that, he turned around and walked back towards the console room.

A few minutes later, the TARDIS began wheezing with its usual rhythm, coughing its way back into ordinary space and time. The gynoids watched for a while, waiting for the ghostly after-image of the police box to disappear, then sulked off into the desert.

Idly, the Carnival Queen let her attention wander out into the land of clockwork, and watched the people of Woodwicke as they woke up and realized that it hadn't all been a terrible dream. History breathed out, the world kept turning, and 25

December proceeded according to the usual schedule.

The Carnival Queen sighed.

-– And a merry Christmas to all of you at home, she said.

**An Epilogue:**

**One Way or Another, the World Will Be**

**Saved**

The men looked grumpy. Distinctly grumpy. Though the militia were duty-bound to be ready for action at all times, none of them had been expecting to work on Christmas morning, and Jake McCrimmon was waiting to see which of them would be the first to complain, or to question an order, or

– worst of all – to start singing *The Bonnie Way Back*, the way soldiers always did when they wanted to give up and go home.

God's truth, if it had been like this in the old days – when McCrimmon had stood against the Sassenach hordes at Dolman Hill, or even when

he'd watched his elder clansmen fight the seige of Quebec – then the world would have been in the grip of anarchy by now. Back then, any man who griped or grumbled or answered back or even *looked* like he wasn't pleased to be serving his country would have been tied to a big tree and thrashed senseless. A command from a superior had been like an order from On High, in those days, like an edict from the Pope himself.

McCrimmon led his poxy band through the riot-worn streets of Woodwicke, finally bringing them to a halt on the corner of a place called Burr Street. Anarchy had been loosed upon the town, right enough. The place stank of liquor, the road littered with the remains of shattered beer-barrels. A few of the townsfolk wandered to and fro across the street, dazed and lost expressions on their faces. A man was curled up in the ashes of a bonfire, a scrap of sackcloth clenched in his hands, a bloody makeshift bandage wrapped around his head. The man was weeping, and McCrimmon guessed he'd been weeping for hours.

Then there were the buildings. The buildings, which looked like they'd started melting in the rain. Even the soldiers stopped their mutinous murmurings when they saw that.

Where the walls had folded in on themselves, McCrimmon saw ungodly patterns in the bricks and the timbers, like leering, half-formed faces. Dozens of families had left this God-forsaken town in the early hours, according to the authorities in Dill Village. Mass hysteria, some had said. But hysteria couldn't turn walls into jelly, could it?

McCrimmon ordered his men – the literate ones, anyway –

to note down everything they saw. His chiefs would want to know all the grim little details, surely. Information was like gold dust to the Special Congress, and McCrimmon had a sworn duty to report incidents like this one to them.

'Anomalies', the chiefs called them. The Congress knew it could trust him to tie up any awkward loose ends, and besides, like Mr Jefferson himself had told him, the strangeness was in his very blood...

France, of course, wasn't the only country with a Shadow Directory.

The old woman on the ground floor – the landlady, Duquesne guessed – was huddled by the fire, nodding to herself. That was all she did. Nod. When Duquesne had introduced herself, the woman had nodded.

When Duquesne had asked after Tourette, the woman had nodded. Duquesne imagined that someone could probably loot the whole boarding house without the woman even noticing. She'd seen the horror, and she'd lost her mind to it.

And was she the only one? Duquesne recalled the 'magic box', the magician – the Doctor – the lightning god – standing at the ship's helm, carrying her home. Vague memories.

Nothing more.

She made her way up the creaking stairs, and began searching the rooms on the upper floor. It didn't take her long to find the place where Tourette had been staying; the door had been broken off its hinges, and a solid metal box lay among the furnishings that littered the room, housing one of the Shadow Directory's miraculous communications machines. There was no sign of Tourette himself.

A strip of paper was hanging from the device, presumably a message from the Directory. If Tourette had been taken from this place by force – and it seemed likely – then he might not even have seen it before he'd been dragged away. Duquesne knelt down to read it.

SSM14GTOU AGENT TOURETTE PROTOCOL

CODING LOVE-LIES-BLEEDING VERIFY LOVE-LIES-BLEEDING VERIFY LOVE-LIES-BLEEDING

Love-Lies-Bleeding. A Directory code, meaning that a situation had got out of hand, that the system had broken down. Usually it was an order for an agent to leave the site immediately, cleaning up... destroying... any loose ends they could find. The message went on:

END ASSIGNMENT WITH DISCRETION NO

FURTHER AGENTS TO ENTER NEW YORK SSMMDUQ

AGENT DUQUESNE RETIRED SSM14EN

And then Marielle Duquesne was standing, spinning around, falling over a broken card table, stumbling against the door-frame. Retired. Retired. The sign that an agent was no longer effective, that she might have been contaminated by a *caillou*. Such things happened. Of course they happened. Why, if the Directory learned that a whole town had been poisoned by a *caillou*'s madness, the first thing it would do was make sure that any field agents in the area were retired, so that their

‘abilities’ couldn’t be compromised, so that their secrets were kept safe. Retired. Retired. Retired by *chirurgeon*.

Marielle Duquesne ran out of the room, ran down the stairs, and ran out into the streets. She kept running, well aware that she’d probably never be able to stop.

Christmas. One of those little superstitions...

Erskine Morris was out on one of his long walks. Every Sunday and every holy holiday, he did the same thing, strutting through the town and making sure that the world could see how far away he was from the church. Of course, this was a walk like no other. There was broken glass under his boots, for one thing, and many of the familiar roads had been declared out-of-bounds by the militia. Still, he tried not to let it change anything. It was Christmas Day. A day for walking.

But he stopped when he reached Eastern Walk. Most of the debris had already been cleared away there, and the more courageous locals were beginning to return to their homes.

Erskine’s eye was caught by a single tent, erected at the side of the road, the only survivor of the ‘attractions’ that he and the other Renewalists had –

Ho hum, ho hum. Think about something else. The weather. The birds and the bees. The mating habits of the average Catholic. Ho hum, ho hum.

He approached the tent hesitantly, but it wasn’t until he reached the flap that he really recognized it. It had been pulled down the night before, but someone had knotted the torn fabrics together and put it back up again. The tent was made from a grubby scarlet material, painted with stars and moon-signs. Erskine took a deep breath, and walked in.

‘Sit down,’ said the witch-woman.

Erskine sat. He’d never seen the woman before, but Christ knew it wasn’t hard to guess who she was. He’d been scouring the town for her, not twelve hours ago, back when he’d worn the sackcloth mask of Reason and... ho hum.

‘Didn’t think you’d still be in town,’ Erskine mumbled.

‘After what we... you know. After what happened.’ It was the closest

thing to an apology that he could manage. The witch-woman just shrugged.

‘This is going to be my last day here,’ she said. ‘Have you seen Isaac Penley anywhere this morning? I heard he’d...

recovered from his injuries. Do you know him?’ Erskine swallowed, and shook his head. ‘I thought I owed him one last reading. There was something I thought he should know.

About the future.’

Penley. Erskine wanted to tell the woman about the Doctor and his abomination, but... hellfire, where would he find the right words? He imagined Penley, with his pinned-together face and his bits-and-pieces body, sitting here in the tent asking his usual moronic questions. Just like always. Asking witches, priests, stargazers, charlatans... anyone who’d talk to him.

Erskine suddenly felt like crying.

‘The future,’ he said. ‘By Christ, yes. This is what it’s all about, isn’t it? Yesterday, I called myself a rationalist.

Wouldn’t be seen dead in a place like this. Look at me now.

Look at all of us. Us poor buggering human beings, doing things we never thought we were capable of, in the name of gods we don’t really believe in. Us and our revolutions and our witch-hunts and our bloody scientific reform societies.

That’s what old Isaac was worried about all the time, isn’t it?’

The witch-woman sighed. ‘It might be like that,’ she said.

‘The future might be any number of things. But history’s made by people, not by gods and monsters. If there was ever a time to change it...’

She sighed again.

‘The future’s not what it used to be,’ she said. ‘That’s all I can say. The rest, you’ll have to work out for yourself. If you see Isaac, can you tell him that?’

The Doctor had slipped into a new suit, but it was identical to the old one. Chris didn’t know where the replacement had appeared from. He

hadn't watched the Doctor get changed, either; he reasoned that there were some things no human being should ever witness.

Now they were taking the longest possible route back to the console room, clearing up the mess on the way. The Doctor found Interface's control unit in the 'human's corridor', removed a few vital components and 'accidentally' lost them down the back of a sofa in one of the guest rooms. He also poked his head into the library to make sure that the hallway was in one piece again, picking up a copy of *A Passage to India* that had been left on the floor.

The Doctor flipped through the book, and Chris looked over his shoulder. Every page was a space, the mouth of an impossible meta-dimensional tunnel. Every page led to a different location in the TARDIS. The ultimate secret passage.

'Nothing like getting lost in a good book,' said the Doctor, and smiled. 'Hackney Empire, 1957.'

'That's what *I* said,' replied Chris. 'Hang on, you've talked about the Hackney Empire before, haven't you? What was it?

I mean, was it anything like *my* Empire?'

'Ah, the Hackney Empire. A ruthless intergalactic superpower, conquering whole civilizations with appalling puns and jokes about dogs with no noses.'

'No noses? How did they smell?'

The Doctor paused, as if trying to resist a terrible temptation.

'Do you know, I don't believe the question was ever satisfactorily answered?' he said eventually.

At last, they reached the console room. Within seconds the Doctor was back at the controls, furiously jabbing at the switches. 'So much to do,' he muttered. 'Yemaya... we still haven't found out... the SLEEPY project...'

'Doctor?'

'What did she say? Killing lessons... the Shadow Directory... too many coincidences... probably means something...'

'Doctor,' I wanted to ask you a question. About the Carnival Queen.'

The Doctor looked up, but his fingers kept moving. ‘The who?’

Chris didn’t know how to respond to that. Was the Doctor just trying to change the subject? He did that a lot, whenever anyone made him feel uncomfortable. Perhaps that was one of the reasons why Chris didn’t trust him any more...

The thought made him start. Since when had he not trusted the Doctor?

‘Oh yes, *her*,’ said the Doctor, hurriedly. ‘Don’t worry about her, Chris. She doesn’t have any power over us now. It was never her place to force the irrational universe on us, you know. She could just offer the possibility...’

‘That’s what I wanted to ask about. The choice I made. I didn’t... I mean, it *was* the right choice, wasn’t it?’

Which is when the Doctor started staring. One of his long, dark, Paddington-Bear stares. ‘There wasn’t any right choice,’

he said, almost under his breath. ‘If it helps, you made the same choice *we* made.’

Chris blinked. ‘You mean... what she told me about the Watchmakers... it was true?’

Aeons seemed to pass.

‘Don’t be silly,’ the Doctor finally announced, brightly.

‘That wouldn’t make sense. Now. I thought we might pop back and have a word with Doctor Johnson, see if we can get him to include "derationalized" in his dictionary. I’m tired of not having the vocabulary to describe my enemies properly...’

Matheson Catcher hid in the undergrowth, too terrified to move, too terrified even to breathe, lest he breathe out of rhythm and bring the whole world crashing down around him.

The blue box remained in the glade, solid and unchanging, but Catcher wasn’t fooled for a minute. He didn’t know how long he’d been watching – hours, probably – but he thought it was probably about time he blinked. He couldn’t even recall why he was watching the box, or where he’d been before that.

Perhaps –

– there! It was happening! The box was shifting, shimmering, fading into thin air. Cacophony! The chaos was taking its creation back into its unholy bosom and *slither* went the plants and the shrubs and *slither* and *slither* and before he knew it, Catcher was running, because the undergrowth was alive, because the vines and the creepers were reaching out for him, grabbing at him and trying to pull him down into the filthy earth, and he tripped over a root, and it laughed, dancing to the wheezing, groaning sound of Cacophony's engine...

But he was back on his feet in an instant, and hurtling through the woods, trampling the evil weeds underfoot and snapping off the branches as they tried to molest him. There.

There in front of him, in the shade between two of the taller trees, was the silhouette of a man. The thorns on the branches (were branches supposed to have thorns?) were drawing blood from his hands, but the man was mere yards away, and then Catcher wouldn't be alone any more, he'd have another being of Reason with him, an ally against nature's darkness.

The man stepped out from under the trees.

'Cah... hurrr,' the man groaned. 'Catch... errr!'

Catcher stopped running. It wasn't a man. IT WASN'T A MAN IT WASN'T A MAN IT WAS A IT WAS A IT WAS

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'Whyy... di' you... *do* thisss?' the appalling thing asked.

And Catcher felt the things of Hell reaching up out of the ground, wrapping their sticky shoots around his ankles. They were dragging him down, down into the abyss, down into the dark, and there was a flash of green as his head hit the ground, and then blackness, just blackness, nothing else.

There was a tree on Paris Street, newly planted in the dirt near the smoking corpse of the church. Marielle Duquesne regarded it suspiciously from the shelter of the alleyway. It was a fir tree, but its branches were decked with shiny baubles and silver stars. Was the tree part of the madness, or just some strange American custom? It was hard to tell. Without the Sight, she had no way of knowing what was normal and what was the spoor of a *caillou*.

‘I used to like alleys, too,’ said a voice. ‘Good places to hide. Don’t need them any more, though.’

Duquesne heard herself cry out. She turned, imagining the horror that might be standing behind her. A *chirurgeon*, no doubt, come to enforce her retirement. She pictured a shadow in a black hat, a scalpel in his hand...

... instead, she came face-to-face with a boy. No, a man.

No, something between the two. He was covered in dirt, and his clothes were all but shredded, yet his eyes were bright and there were traces of a smile on his face.

‘Where are you going?’ the boy asked.

Duquesne shook her head. ‘I do not know. Please. Leave me. I must not be seen.’ But as she said it, she wondered why she was even bothering to hide. I might be able to avoid the first assassin they send to me, she thought, or the second, or the third... but the Shadow Directory has all the hired killers of Napoleon’s kingdom at its disposal. And I am alone. And one person cannot fight an empire.

‘Depends. Depends whether the one person knows what she’s doing.’

Duquesne coughed, the way ladies were supposed to cough when they were embarrassed. The way her parents had taught her. ‘I’m sorry,’ she said. ‘I must have been thinking out loud, I...’

Then she saw the thing in the boy’s hands, and she recognized it, without knowing how or why. And there was something spreading through her nervous system, filling up the space where the Sight had been, almost as if it were flooding out from the boy, through the sphere in his hands, into her spine. The sensations were the same ones she’d been feeling since her adolescence, but somehow less painful, more controlled, more... rational?

‘I understand,’ she said. ‘ *Dieu*. I understand.’

But the boy just kept smiling ‘What can I do?’ she asked him ‘What should I do?’

‘We’ll think of something.’ The boy’s attention was caught by something over her shoulder, and he stepped out onto Paris Street. ‘Roz’s idea,’ he said, pointing at the fir tree. ‘She said it’s how they mark Christmas, where she comes from. The Doctor had it in his

TARDIS. And all the decorations. They put it up first thing this morning.'

'Doctor...?' queried Duquesne.

The boy reached out for one of the few branches that wasn't already dripping with stars and angels. He balanced the golden sphere amongst the fir needles, and it stayed there, quite happy to remain on the branch in spite of the laws of gravity. Seen from a distance, it just looked like any other bauble.

'You're leaving it there?' asked Duquesne, stepping out of the shadows and joining him by the tree. The boy nodded.

'Won't be needing it any more. World's ready to make its own rules. You're from France?'

'Ahh. Yes, yes I am...'

'You going back there? You've got a ship?'

Duquesne hesitated. 'I don't... there are problems. It may not be safe...

'Like I said. We'll think of something.' The boy set off along Paris Street, and Marielle Duquesne found herself walking with him 'I want to see France,' he said. 'There's supposed to be some people there that I've got a lot in common with...'

And, together, they headed for the docks.

February, 1800.

Cardinal Pontormo finished reading the reports of the so–

called Woodwicke incident', and realized that he was no wiser than when he'd started. He rubbed his eyes, slipped the records back into their bindings, and returned them to the shelf, where – amongst other things – they joined the Secret Travelogues of the Khan-Balik Caravan and the only surviving copy of Preslin's thesis *On Co-incidence as a Disease*.

Of course, he reminded himself, the French wouldn't have told him anything about the incident at all, if they hadn't wanted the Crow Gallery to look after their 'live specimen'. It was said that although the skies of America had been thick with demons on Christmas Eve, only two of the abominations had survived the dawn. One was the oft-

sighted ‘forest monster’ that now haunted the woodlands outside the town, a source of much amusement in the New York press. The Shadow Directory – and the Special Congress as well, no doubt – had tried to capture the animal, so far without success.

But the *other* creature... Cardinal Pontormo remembered the first time he’d seen the thing, when it had been brought to South Africa in the belly of a French cargo ship. Pontormo was used to atrocities by now, but the beast had seemed grotesque even by the ‘usual’ standards of the Gallery. The way the sinews had writhed inside its limbs, the way little pools of shadow had danced over its body, the way parts of its blackened skin had almost looked like clothes, clothes that had been welded to its flesh... even the lump on its head had reminded Pontormo of a stovepipe hat, and its glass eyes could almost have been spectacles.

The Cardinal wondered what the life expectancy of such a beast would be, down in the vaults on the lowest level of the Gallery. He found himself wishing that it would die soon, then prayed God forgive him the thought.

He was happy. Yes. An unfamiliar word, but not an irrational one. After all, hadn’t he felt this way before, when he’d been in the little room and the Watchmakers had sent their messenger to him? But now there wasn’t even a room, there was just the *essence* of a room, a realm of pure, hard Reason.

He was cast into a grey cube as firm as concrete, his intelligence seeping into the structure until he was nothing but angles and lines...

Happy. Yes. That was the word.

The doctors looked at each other, shook their heads, and walked away. The same thing they did every morning, in fact.

Richmond Hospital’s newest patient had been found out in the woods near a neighbouring town, and his bed had been paid for by the local council, even though the town didn’t seem to want anything more to do with him. One newspaper claimed that the man had been ‘the first victim of the forest monster’, but of course everybody knew that was rubbish; there wasn’t a mark on him. Some kind of psychological damage, the doctors thought. The patient’s breathing was regular, but his muscles were rigid and there were no signs of brain activity. Oddly, his closed eyelids kept twitching, for no reason anybody could ascertain. Twitching. Once every eight seconds.

Whatever the condition was, the doctors agreed, it was probably incurable.

Deep in the TARDIS, there were places where the halls and the corridors and the boot-cupboards seemed to lack all logic and proportion. If anyone had asked the Doctor, he would have said that these were the undigested remains of Catcher's UnTARDIS, little corners of Cacophony, locked into the solid body of the ship, trapped like flies in amber.

Christopher Cwej sat in the middle of a shifting courtyard, surrounded by gothic archways set at ridiculous angles and phantom corridors that didn't lead anywhere. The place was much like the TARDIS cloisters, but the artificial sky above his head was dark, and there were things he couldn't name seeping through the cracks in the floor. Wolsey the cat was curled in his lap, purring softly, and the walls rippled gently to the sound.

– Ahh, Christopher, whispered the room. Poor Christopher.

If you could only have seen the destiny that history has chosen for you... if you could only have understood the curse of the Watchmakers, and who its victims really are...

In a nearby alcove, one of the roundels blossomed open, closely followed by another, then another. An eye looked around the hall, focusing on Chris Cwej as he sat in his own little secret garden. An ear listened to the whispers, searching for their source, then realizing that they came from somewhere beyond the rational universe. A mouth frowned, disapprovingly.

– Perhaps I should have shown you how it all ends, said the whispers. Perhaps you didn't understand the choice after all.

Nobody was watching as the roundels closed, and the eye, the ear, and the mouth melted away into the fabric of the ship.

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